

What to Do During a Gas Leak: Ameren's "Smell Gas, Act Fast" Campaign Hopes to Save Lives

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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COLLINSVILLE - Ameren journeyman Jake Dukett recently spoke to a homeowner who had been living with a gas leak for over two weeks.

Believe it or not, this story is not uncommon. The homeowner had smelled that signature rotten egg stench, but they didn't call 911 or Ameren because they didn't want to inconvenience anyone or get stuck with a huge service bill. To prevent this from happening again, Ameren Illinois has launched a "Smell Gas, Act Fast" campaign to spread awareness about gas leaks and how Ameren will fix a gas leak immediately, completely free of charge.

"When in doubt, make that phone call," Dukett said. "We don't charge you to come out. We are a 24/7/365 service. That's what we're here for, to keep our community safe."

Dukett is also a volunteer assistant fire chief, and he knows firsthand how dangerous unchecked gas leaks can be. While natural gas is nontoxic to breathe, it's highly flammable. He said the industry has seen four houses explode this year.

You can call 911 to report a gas leak and they will contact Ameren, or you can contact Ameren directly. Larry Beard is an Ameren journeyman, which means he is a part of the gas emergency response crew. Beard and his fellow journeymen boast an average response time of 22 minutes. After making sure everyone is out of the house, a journeyman will check the gas meter with a combustible gas indicator (CGI), which ticks if it detects natural gas or carbon monoxide.

"The CGI picks up the gas that you cannot smell," Beard explained. "Your nose is not calibrated for the gas; this is."

The journeymen will then enter the house and use the CGI to check the pipes and every gas appliance in the home. If they identify a leak and it's something they can fix, they will do so. Otherwise, they'll make sure the homeowner gets in touch with a licensed HVAC contractor. If the leak is coming from a gas appliance, the journeymen will shut off the appliance and issue a "red tag" so the homeowner can get it repaired.

Dukett said carbon monoxide is another major concern, as this gas has no smell and can be deadly. He encourages people to change the batteries in their carbon monoxide detector every few months and always check the manufacturing date to make sure the detector is working properly. The CGI also responds to carbon monoxide so the journeymen can stay safe on the job.

"If at any time we see an elevated level of gas or an elevated level of carbon monoxide, then we kind of stop what we're doing right then and there, evacuate out, and then we start our emergency plan," Dukett explained. "We'll get first responders involved, we'll get supervisors involved, we'll help ventilate the house, and then we'll go from there."

Most people don't discover a gas leak until they notice the rotten egg smell, which is actually the result of an odorant that Ameren Illinois adds to the gas so homeowners can detect a leak. But there are ways to prevent gas leaks altogether. Regular inspections of gas appliances and safe digging practices are two of the easiest ways to avoid a gas leak.

If you are planning to dig on your property, [call 811](#) a few days in advance so someone can come out and mark where gas lines are buried. People often nick a gas line on accident, which leads to a gas leak. Dukett noted that even driving a stake in the ground, such as replacing a fence post, counts as digging and has been known to cause gas leaks. If you're not sure whether to call, prioritize your safety and call 811 before you dig; their service is completely free.

The journeymen hope the "Smell Gas, Act Fast" campaign will encourage people to call Ameren immediately if they suspect a gas leak. As Dukett said, there's no reason to wait.

"We're here to provide a service and we want to do that," he added. "We want to absolutely keep them safe, so call."

You can learn more about Ameren Illinois and their gas leak prevention tips at their [official website, Ameren.com/Illinois](https://www.ameren.com/Illinois).



