Homeowners Tips — Water Leaks

Water leaks in and around the home can be more harmful than you might think. Water can cause damage to both personal and real property. And, it can pose risks by creating safety, health, structural and electrical hazards around your home.

While most leaks are obvious, some are not. It is important to detect leaks as soon as possible to help lessen the potential damage. In many cases, following some maintenance and inspection tips can help you identify and fix problems before they become an issue. Below are some helpful tips to help you steer clear of some common water problems in and around the home.

Maintenance and Inspection

Most plumbing parts do not last forever. They have a life expectancy — and depending on their age, use, exposure, or damage — they may fail sooner rather than later. For this reason it becomes important to maintain, test and/or inspect the following regularly:

- **Sinks and tubs** — Check the faucets and supply lines and their connections, for drips, dampness, water stains, rust, corrosion, and buildup. Check for leaks around the faucets and pipes. Keep drains clean with regular maintenance. Replace any missing or damaged caulk or grout.

- **Toilet** — Check for water stains, discoloration or dampness around the base of the toilet. If there is a sewer smell, this could be a sign that the toilet is not properly sealed at its base. When remodeling, be sure to adjust the sewer pipe height if the elevation of the flooring is changed.
- **Washing machines** — Inspect the supply lines and angle stops for cracks, discoloration, dampness, buildup, and leaks. Older rubber supply line hoses become brittle with age and wear out. Flexible stainless steel supply lines have a longer life expectancy. It is a good practice to turn off the water supply to the washing machine when not in use.

- **Angle stops** — These are the individual shut off valves for plumbing fixtures. Test these valves by turning them off and on. Look for leaks or listen for sounds of water running through the line while the system is off. If your angle stop is older and has not been used for a while it may be difficult to turn on and off. For testing purposes do not force the valve. Look for moisture, rust corrosion and build up on the angle stop.
- **Supply lines** — These are the individual lines running from the angle stops to the fixture or appliance, for all plumbing fixtures and appliances. When testing the angle stops, inspect the supply line hoses/pipes for cracks, leaks, bulges,

discoloration, mold, rust, corrosion and buildup.

- **Refrigerator** — Inspect the supply line for cracks, discoloration, leaks, etc. Many refrigerator water supply lines are plastic, and when exposed to the heat of the refrigerator's exchange coil, can deteriorate. Stainless steel or copper supply lines usually last longer and do not have the same heat issues as plastic lines.
- **Water heaters** — Drain your water heater as recommended by the manufacturer. Check the supply lines for signs of deterioration or leaks.
- **Water softening units** — Keep the right balance of chemicals. Exceeding the manufacturer's or city's recommendation puts excessive chemicals in your plumbing systems. This wears on the pipes and their connections. Follow the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule.

Know where your home's main water shutoff valve, fixtures and appliance individual shutoff valves and outdoor sewer clean-out are located before an emergency occurs. When you are dealing with an emergency, every minute counts. You'll want to shut off the water immediately. This will reduce the amount of water going into your home or onto your property.

If you do have a leak, turn off the supply line where the leak is coming from or, if necessary, your home's main water shut-off valve. Remember — water and electricity do not mix. Do not use any electricity in the water-affected area until you are sure it is safe.

Water Leak Detection

The simplest way to determine if you have an undetected water leak is to find your water meter and take a baseline reading. Do not use any water for a few hours then read your meter again. If the readings are not the same, there may be a leak in your home or on your property. Receiving an unusually high water bill can also be a sign of an undetected leak.

Outside your home, check the regulator. Most newer plumbing systems have a water pressure regulator next to the home's main water shut off valve. Have the water pressure checked to make sure it is not exceeding the pounds of pressure recommended for your home. Most homes can have between 50 and 70 pounds of pressure coming into their system.

Also, check the foundation. On a slab foundation, hot spots on the floor can be a sign of a water leak (this is not applicable when the home's floor has a radiant heating system).

Be sure to consult with an appropriate professional, such as a plumber or electrician, for discovered problems.

Taking some simple and easy steps now can save you time and money later