

Water Heater Maintenance

eNewsletter *Homeowner Tips*

Most people don't give much thought to their water heater - they just turn on the faucet and expect hot water to come out. However, a leaking water heater can damage your home. Even a small, slow leak can soak into the subflooring and cause decay. Leaking water may also seep into carpeting, create mold and permanently stain your walls.

Prevent water leaks while keeping your water heater in peak operating condition by performing some simple maintenance.

How to Drain and Clean the Tank

The first task is to drain the tank at least once a year. This will remove most of the sediment collecting at the bottom of the tank. To drain the tank, follow these steps:

- First, inspect the water heater, especially its base, for water leaks. Call a qualified plumber if you suspect a problem.
- If you don't find any leaks, turn the gas switch to "pilot" to prevent the burners from coming on while you are flushing it. For electric water heaters, turn off the electricity at the circuit breaker. This also prevents heating elements from burning out.
- Attach a garden hose to the drain valve at the bottom of the tank.
- Close the incoming cold water valve at the top of the tank.
- Carefully open the pressure relief valve on the tank to break the vacuum.
- Open the drain valve at the bottom of the heater allowing the water to flow out through the garden hose. Make sure the outlet of the hose is in a safe area away from pets and children. It can be very hot and can scald quickly.
- If sediment is clogging the drain valve, then try closing the temperature/pressure relief valve and turn the cold inlet valve back on to "power flush" the sediment out.
- When the water from the garden hose runs clear, you can refill your water heater.
- Prior to refilling your water heater you should open a hot water valve in your line to allow the air to escape as your water heater refills.
- When finished, reverse the process, remembering to not turn on the gas or electricity after the tank has refilled.



Inspect the exhaust stack

Inspect the exhaust stack, including the flue and draft deflector collar, on gas fired hot water heaters to ensure that all pipe connections are secure and free of rust, corrosion, and obstructions (annually). Note: It is essential that fuel fired hot water heaters vent their gasses to the outside; escape of gasses inside the home could be lethal & pose a fire hazard.

Inspect the insulation blanket

If you have installed an insulation blanket around the tank of your hot water heater, about every three months you should check to ensure that the insulation stays in the proper position, noting particularly that it is not blocking the combustion air inlet or the exhaust vent of gas fired units.

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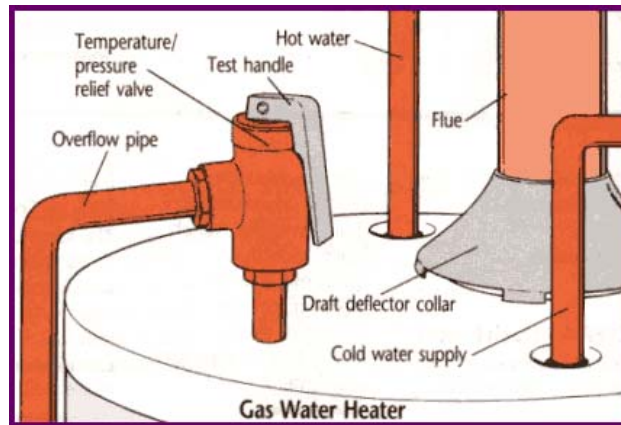
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Inspect the temperature/pressure relief valve

Another item to check when carrying out annual maintenance is the temperature/pressure relief valve. This is a valve on the side of the tank near the top. It should be connected to a pipe that directs the water down and away from the tank so that scalding water does not spray a person if the valve releases due to excessive pressure. The valves should be opened at least once a year to make sure they work and do not become clogged with calcium carbonate. You can test the valve while the water tank is full by lifting the handle slightly. Do this with caution because it will release hot water. Put a container under the drainpipe to catch the water. If the valve does not release, or if it will not shut off after the test, then it is corroded and needs to be replaced.



+ SAFETY NOTE:

Always wear gloves, goggles and other protective clothing while performing maintenance on your water heater.



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