

Fix & Prevent Water Leaks



A leak that drips once per second wastes more than 250 gallons of water each month. A silent toilet leak wastes between 50 and 500 gallons of water per day, and leaky pipes can waste hundreds of gallons of water, destroy valuable property and increase your water bill. Save valuable time and money by preventing, finding, and fixing leaks with these six tips:

1. LOCATE YOUR EMERGENCY WATER SHUTOFF

Find the location of your emergency, or whole-house, water shutoff valve. Emergency water shutoff valves are found in basements or outside near the home's foundation. If your shutoff valve is inaccessible or you are unable to locate the valve, call a plumber for help. Fixtures also have water shutoff valves that should be turned off before working on them when you don't need to shut off water to the entire house.

If you've shut off your water, turn it back on slowly to prevent a "water hammer" – a sudden change in pressure that can damage pipe joints and fittings. If you shut off your faucets or valves very quickly and hear a banging noise in your pipes, this is also a water hammer.

2. BECOME A LEAK DETECTIVE

Find water leaks or breaks with these simple sleuthing tools:

Read your utility bill

Review your water bill for unusually high use. If you notice an unexplainable increase in water use, or if your bill spikes after freezing weather, there's a good chance you might have a leak or a break in a water pipe.

Check your water meter

If you suspect a leak, your water meter can help confirm your suspicion.

- a) Turn off all faucets and water-using appliances.

- b) Record the values on your water meter.
- c) Do not use water for an hour.
- d) Check the meter after an hour and note any change in value.
- e) If the values change, you have a leak.

Use your eyes & ears

To locate a leak:

- a) Listen for toilets that run.
- b) Watch for faucets that drip.
- c) Look for soggy soil around sprinkler heads after connecting garden hoses, mowing the lawn or turning on automatic sprinkler systems. These areas may have a broken irrigation pipe or leaky hose. On the other hand, you could just be overwatering and causing soggy areas; to find out more about watering wisely, contact Tacoma Water's conservation program.
- d) Turn on an automatic irrigation system and check for broken sprinkler heads and pipes, or overspray onto hard surfaces.

Some water leaks can be hard to detect because they occur in underground pipes. If there is no explanation for an increase in your water bill, it's possible you have a hidden leak.

Saving Water Makes Sense

3. FIX LEAKY FAUCETS & TOILETS

Do-it-yourself repair books provide step-by-step instructions for fixing common plumbing problems. Diagram your fixture when taking it apart to show the order of its pieces. Take broken parts to the hardware store where employees help you find the right products and provide guidance.

Faucets

A faucet that drips once per second wastes 3,150 gallons of water per year. Most faucet leaks can easily be fixed by replacing the washer.

Toilets

Most leaks in toilets occur when water constantly overflows into the overflow pipe in the tank or when water seeps through the flapper into the toilet bowl without flushing. Depending on where the leak is, you may be able to fix it yourself, or you may need to call a plumber for repair. Here's how to check your toilet:

- a) Take the lid off the tank, flush and watch. The water level should come up to about 1 inch below the overflow tube. If it comes up higher, it's easy for water to continuously overflow and run down the drain.
- b) Check to see if you have a leak in or around the flapper or ball valve at the bottom of the tank by putting a little food coloring in the tank. Don't flush and wait to see if any color appears in the bowl. If it does and the flapper needs to be replaced, make sure you buy the right one for your toilet because the wrong flapper model may also leak.

4. PREVENT FROZEN PIPES

Expansion caused by freezing water is a common cause for leaky pipes. Prepare your plumbing for winter to prevent breaks with five easy steps:

Insulate pipes & valves

Wrap pipes exposed to freezing temperatures with pipe insulation. This includes pipes located outdoors, in attics, crawl spaces, basements and garages. Pipe insulation is available at many hardware stores. Wrap hose bibs with insulating material.

Turn off hose bibs & valves

Shut off and drain outside faucets to prevent freezing. Turn off the individual shutoff valves and open hose bibs to drain faucets, Remember to remove and drain hoses.

Circulate air

If there will be a deep freeze, open doors inside the house allowing warm air to circulate. Keep your thermostat set no lower than 55°F while away from home.

Drain outdoor water lines

Irrigation systems and water features need to be drained in autumn.

5. WHAT TO DO IF YOUR PIPES FREEZE

If your home is without water, the problem could be in the pipes leading up to the water meter. More often however, only one or two faucets in the home are waterless, which means the problem is located between the meter and your house. Tacoma Water is responsible for repairs to water pipes in the street up to and including, the meter. You are responsible for repairs from the meter to your home and throughout your home. If your pipes freeze, here's what you can do:

Shut off water

Turn water off at the emergency shutoff valve to reduce potential water damage to your home.

- a) Immediately call Tacoma Water if you can't turn off the water.
- b) If completely without water, prevent damage to your water heater by turning off the power to it.
- c) Turn on your water and power to your water heater only after water service is restored.

Thaw pipes

- a) Contact a plumber or your water utility for information on how to properly thaw frozen pipes.

6. CALL TACOMA WATER TO REPORT WATER MAIN LEAKS, LOW PRESSURE & FOR EMERGENCY METER SHUTOFF

Contact Tacoma Water Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. by calling (253)502-8384. For service after hours call (253) 502-8344.

For more information

about water conservation and household leaks, call (253)502-8723, e-mail conservation@cityoftacoma.org or visit www.mytpu.org.



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