

## How to Stay in Hot Water

If it's doing its job, you don't give it a second thought. But when hot water is elusive for your morning shower and that sink full of dishes, or even worse, its contents are inches deep on the floor and seeping through the walls, your water heater has your full attention.

The average life span of a water heater is about 10 years. Rusting and build up of sediment in the tank could shorten its life while some preventative maintenance may extend it.

What can you do to make life a little easier on your water heater?

- Twice a year, drain a bucket of water from your hot water storage tank until it runs clear (about five gallons). This removes sediment that absorbs heat energy and causes the unit to waste fuel. Be sure to check your appliance's owner's manual for instructions.
- Anti-corrosion anode rods in your water heater protect against rusting. The anode attracts corrosion that would otherwise attack the tank's wall. Having a plumber replace the anodes every three to four years could add to the life of your tank.
- Strapping your water heater to the wall studs can help to keep it from breaking loose of its connections during an earthquake. Insulating the storage tank and pipes can help reduce heat loss. Kits and materials for both these projects can be found at hardware stores or home improvement centers.
- For gas-fueled water heaters, check the flue assembly twice a year to be sure it's properly aligned and all its joints are sealed. If you ever smell gas, leave your house immediately and call your gas company for help.

## Water detectors can help keep you dry

Did you know you can buy devices that detect water where it's not wanted in your home? Many water sensors are inexpensive, battery-powered styles you can place on sump pumps and other models to put on floors near plumbing that could leak. You don't need any tools, and installation is often simple. Unit alarms sound when they detect water. Alarm transmitters need to be placed where they will be heard if they activate.

Check batteries regularly, just as you should on those for smoke detectors and other safety-related units that use them.

More sophisticated (and costly) water-sensor systems automatically shut off the water supply to the entire house. For some, plumbers must install the special valves and electricians must wire the sensors. Keep in mind these costs are in addition to the price of the hardware.

If you live in an apartment or have a finished basement or an upstairs laundry room or water heater, your residence may be a perfect candidate for a water-sensing system.

Talk to your local plumbing supply store, home improvement center or plumber for information about these systems.

## **How to clean a flooded basement**

A flooded basement can happen almost any time of the year, depending on your local weather, rain and snow patterns. Basements or other areas flooded with surface water, seepage through walls or back flow from sewer lines often suffer little or no structural damage.

Avoiding permanent damage depends on how the water inside is drained or pumped from the basement or flooded area. The first step in dealing with household flooding is to call a professional who can make sure cleanup and repairs are done correctly, and help you prevent mold and related problems. Also check with your insurance agent for advice. Other practical steps:

- Do not drain inside until most of the water outside has gone down. This will help prevent the walls from being pushed in or the floors from heaving.
- Start pumping water out of your basement if it is higher than the flood water level outside.
- Stop pumping when the two water levels become equal.
- Once flood and basement water levels are equal, pump the basement water out at the same rate at which the flood waters recede.
- If the building's electrical panel is located in a flooded area, an electric sump pump is useless. Pumps powered by gasoline or 12-volt auto batteries are two alternatives.
- Use a high-pressure hose to remove silt and dirt stains from concrete and masonry walls.
- If stains remain, scrub with a stiff bristle brush and household detergent.

- Open doors and windows and use a fan or dehumidifier to improve air circulation and help dry the basement. This will help minimize further damage by mold or wood decay.
- If odors remain after cleaning and drying, mop concrete floors and walls with a bleach solution--3/4 cup of household bleach per gallon of water. Rinse and dry after five minutes. Open windows when applying the bleach solution.
- A lump of dry charcoal in an open tin/metal container can help absorb odors.

Warning: Always use caution with any electric appliance in a house that has been flooded. Never turn on wet electric appliances. They may cause an electric shock, overheat or start a fire.

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