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The Pipeline

Volume II

Everything your house wants you to know about its plumbing.

From the Desk of ...

By Anthony Gemma

Just because we're in the business, don't think plumbing problems don't occasionally crop up in our house, too. Many plumbing problems have simple solutions. Here are a few insider tips and some things we've learned from customers about dealing with the most common plumbing snafus.

Anthony Gemma
Wizard of Plumbing

It may sound obvious, but keep a plunger beside each toilet in the house. I don't think I have to say anything more.

It's good to know how to shut off the water in an emergency. This issue of *The Pipeline* includes an article about the wheres and hows of stopping the flow.

Many of our stopped-up toilet calls are due to small children placing large toys in the bowl. If you have kids, it's a good idea to check the toilet bowl before you call us.

If you have a particularly stubborn drain clog, we've heard of a homeowner who used his leaf blower. We don't recommend this, but if you try it, be sure to stand clear because the backsplash could be pretty messy.

Be sure to turn the water off when removing sinks and faucets. You'd be

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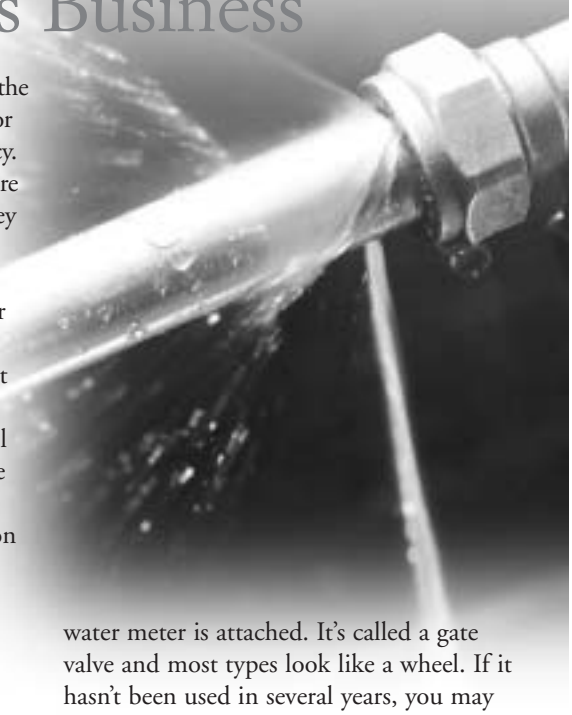
Emergency Water Shut-Off is Everybody's Business



Knowing where and how to shut off the water supply to your entire house, or parts of it, is critical in an emergency. Everyone in your house should know where the valves are located and the direction they need to be turned to stop the flow.

A good first step is to have your plumber show you where every valve is located. You can then attach tags to each one that identify its function and what fixtures it controls. When we're in your home, we'll tag your valves for you and show you the pipes you need to know. Once we have tagged all your valves, take your family on a grand tour of your plumbing shut-off sites. Have them turn the water off and back on so they are familiar with the proper direction to twist.

Another, more elaborate method of identification is to create a valve chart. This is a numbered, color-coded drawing of your basement or crawl space showing the location of all your pipes and valves matched to colored tags attached to the corresponding shut-off. The valve chart is a good idea for homes that have several bathrooms or for multi-family residences.

In emergencies, the most important valve is the main shut-off. It is usually found near the side of your house where the water meter is attached. It's called a gate valve and most types look like a wheel. If it hasn't been used in several years, you may have to use a wrench to close it the first time. It's a good idea to put a few drops of household oil on the handle threads once a year to keep it from corroding and to assure it will turn in case of an emergency.

If your shut-off valves do not look like wheels, they may be ground-key types. Examine your pipes for what looks like the head of a nut in the side of the pipe. Ground-key valves are also used for draining pipes, so keep in mind your plumbing may

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Emergency Water Shut-Off

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have both wheel and ground-key valves. If your house has only ground-key valves, we recommend you have gate valves installed. They're easier to find, faster to use and require no tools. All are important features in an emergency.

"When an emergency arises, the first rule is to stop the flow."

Occasionally, we run into a house that has no way to shut off the water. It's rare, but we do see it. This is a disaster waiting to happen. Give us a call and we will install a main shut-off valve for you.

Well-plumbed houses have individual shut-off valves on the water lines leading to fixtures such as water heaters, dishwashers, sinks and toilets. If a problem occurs, you can turn the water supply off to the culprit (while you call us) and still have water to the rest of your house.

When an emergency arises, the first rule is to stop the flow before it can do serious damage to your home and belongings. Once it's stopped, give us a call. ■

Play the Drain Game

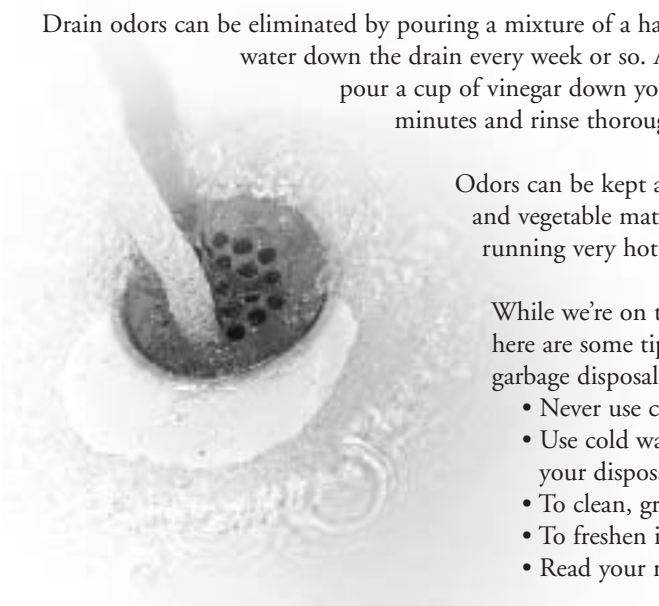
Household drain problems have a way of surfacing at the most inconvenient times. Thanksgiving day, for example, the feast is about to be served and the sink backs up. Or maybe it's just as you're leaving your house and you notice the shower hasn't completely emptied. There are some very simple maintenance steps you can take to keep your drains draining and avoid an inopportune clog.

We're not pointing any fingers, but most drain blockages occur because someone put something into the drain that didn't belong there. Usually it started out as a liquid, but solidified once it reached the trap. Tip number one is set it aside, let it harden and dispose of it in the trash.

Never pour grease down your drains. Try to keep hair and other debris out, too. To prevent soap residue from building up, once a month:

1. Run hot water through your drains.
2. Add three tablespoons of baking soda.
3. Add a little hot water.
4. Let it stand for 15 minutes.
5. Flush it by running hot water.

Drain odors can be eliminated by pouring a mixture of a handful of baking soda and hot water down the drain every week or so. Another proven remedy is to pour a cup of vinegar down your drain, let it stand for 30 minutes and rinse thoroughly with hot water.



Odors can be kept at bay by keeping grease, hair and vegetable matter out of your drains and by running very hot water after each use.

While we're on the subject of drains, here are some tips for maintaining your garbage disposal:

- Never use commercial drain products.
- Use cold water only when operating your disposal.
- To clean, grind up ice cubes.
- To freshen it, grind up lemon peels.
- Read your maintenance manual.

If you still have drain problems and have to call us on Thanksgiving Day, save us a turkey leg. ■

Testing Water for Pollutants

If you're concerned about the quality of your drinking water, perhaps it's time to have it tested.

Generally speaking, your drinking water is safe. All public water systems are required under the EPA Safe Drinking Water Act to regularly test and treat water for certain contaminants. Homeowners with private wells are responsible for testing their own water.

As water moves through the air and soil on its way to its ground collection point, it absorbs dissolved minerals, organic compounds and other organisms and can be affected by both natural and man-made environmental factors. Soil-bourne bacteria and contamination from nearby factories are two of the most common pollutants.

If your drinking water smells and/or tastes odd or, worse, if someone in your family suffers from a mysterious chronic illness, you need to act now. At best, you have a problem in your water pipes. At worst, your drinking water is contaminated. Call us right away, and we'll help you get your water tested or direct you to who can. ■

Don't Let Mildew Get a Foothold

Protecting your home against interior generated moisture is just as important as keeping outside water from getting in. If water is allowed to collect and stand unattended, it can affect your health and the structural integrity of your house.

All homes generate some water and humidity. It should be your goal to keep it at a minimum and well out of the danger zone. Kitchens, baths, laundry rooms and basements are the worst offenders.

Make sure your kitchen, bath and laundry room are ventilated to the outside. Turn on the ventilating fans for a few minutes every day to clear out the moisture. If you're likely to forget to do this, we can install a timer to do this automatically.

Bathrooms are especially susceptible to moisture collection. They get used every day and are normally one of the smallest rooms in a house. Toilets sweat because the cold water cools the tank and causes the humidity in the room to condense on the tank and subsequently drip to the floor or down the wall. A simple, inexpensive solution is to cover the tank with a terrycloth wrap. For excessive toilet tank condensation problems, give us a call, and we will install a mixing valve that warms the water entering the tank.

Mildew can be a health hazard, as well as create a mess. If left unchecked, it can cause respiratory problems and, in extreme cases, rot. It's a fungus that flourishes in damp conditions, such as near leaky pipes found under sinks and in your basement. Examine these spots every month and if you see evidence of mildew, clean it immediately and take steps to remedy the conditions that caused it.

It's a lot easier to keep mildew from starting than to try and get rid of it. Here are a few do-it-yourself measures to keep mildew out:

- Ventilate your basement once a month.
- Run a dehumidifier.
- Make sure clothing is completely dry before putting it away.
- Air out kitchen and bathroom cabinets every month.
- Keep shower and bathtub drains free of soap scum. ■

Plumbing Inspection Protects, Saves

When was the last time you asked your plumber for a fitness report? No, not about what shape he is in, but about the condition of your plumbing. If your answer is "never" or "more than five years ago," it's time to make that call.

A plumbing inspection is a good, hard look at your water pipes and fixtures to see how they're holding up. Even if everything is working fine today, the occasional inspection can uncover potential leaks and failures that could cost you dearly down the road.

Your plumber will assess the current state of everything that whooshes, gurgles, heats water and moves it from one place to another, and present you with a written report of what needs immediate attention and what to keep an eye on. ■

Honey, Did You Hear That Noise?

Plumbing systems occasionally make noises. These clunks and thuds are caused by water traveling at high speeds through your system's pipes. And, while the manufacturers of plumbing fixtures and building contractors make every effort to silence the sounds that shake, rattle and roll as water runs through your system, there will always be some noise but it shouldn't include thumps, whistles and chatters.

Water hammer is that thump you hear when you turn your faucets off and it should not be ignored. The noise you hear is a warning sign that your pipes are being subjected to the wear and tear of multiple shock waves. If left uncorrected, they will create leaks in your pipes, tanks and fixtures.

Installing an air chamber, or short length of pipe, in the wall where the water supply enters the offending fixture, can usually eliminate water hammer. In extreme cases, a shock arrestor can be installed on the main line near your water meter or as close to the source of the noise as possible. Eliminating water hammer takes some skillful detective work by a master plumber to determine if the problem emanates from your system or is caused by an outside source.

> "There will always be some noise but it shouldn't include thumps, whistles and chatters."

Whistling is created by speeding water flowing through improperly sized piping. If your pipes are too small, they will whistle at bends and tees as the water strains to make the turn. A pressure-reducing valve will help as will a general straightening of your home's pipes wherever practical.

Chattering is normally caused by loose pipes, pipes rubbing against metal, by worn faucet washers or internal fixture parts. Silencing plumbing chatter is easy. A quick audit can usually pinpoint the cause and the problem can be remedied in short order. ■

From the Desk of …

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surprised to know how many people don't think of this.

If you're replacing a sink, be sure to caulk around the edges with plumber's putty and install a cleanout trap so you'll be able to retrieve that diamond ring that gets accidentally dropped.

"Many plumbing problems have simple solutions."

If you're replacing your garbage disposal, make sure you punch out the dishwasher hole in the unit. It gets pretty slippery if you don't.

And above all, maintain your sense of humor. Plumbing is not the most fun work, but it has some of the best jokes. Have a great spring and summer and give us a call if we can help. ■

Flood Alarms Are a Smart Move

An inexpensive flood alarm could be the only thing standing between you and thousands of dollars in damages and cleanup costs. Powered by a nine-volt battery, flood alarms sound off when a sensor arm or bendable tail comes in contact with water.

Flood alarms are ideal in the basement or laundry room for detecting sewer backups, overflowing washers, leaky pipes and sump pump failures.

In the bathroom, they serve as sentries for overflowing toilets, bathtubs and sinks.

Chris Stewart
Service Technician

Kitchen placements include under the sink, dishwasher and, if you have an icemaker, the refrigerator.

Flood alarms are generally inexpensive, and like their smoke alarm cousins, are a worthwhile investment. ■

A Tradition of Service

We are committed to providing our customers with the best service at the best price. Our focus is honesty and fairness. We only recommend and perform services you truly need. Furthermore, we only deal with quality vendors and suppliers to make sure any equipment we install is guaranteed to perform as expected. We guarantee your satisfaction every time.

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GEM PLUMBING & HEATING CO., INC.
One Wellington Rd.
Lincoln, RI 02865
(401) 867-5309, (877) GEM-PLUMBING
www.gemplumbing.com