

Tips and Tricks for Plumbing Inspection, Maintenance and Repair



Watch Out For Your Water Lines

This short document will help you to understand how to inspect and maintain your water lines and how to perform simple repairs. But, when in doubt, remember it is better to call a licensed plumber than to risk water damage to your home.

Shutting Off The Water Supply to Your House

The most important thing you can do for your plumbing is learn how to shut off the water supply to your entire home and to individual fixtures. When you have a leak, this may be crucial.

The water main is the pipe from the water company's meter at the street to the inlet pipe to your house. Individual supply lines branch off from this main line to carry water to all of the fixtures in your home (faucets, toilets, etc.). Each of these individual supply lines should have its own shut-off valve. Become familiar with their locations (under sinks, beside toilets, near the water heater) so that if a leak occurs at one of your fixtures, you can turn the water off there while you wait for the plumber to come, instead of turning off the water to the entire house.

If you do need to shut off the water to the entire house, use one of the two main line shut-off valves.

- ❖ One shut-off valve is usually located where the water line comes in to the house, usually in the basement or crawl space on an outside wall near the front of the house. This shutoff valve can usually be turned off by hand. Just turn the valve handle clockwise to turn off all water to the house.
- ❖ The other shut-off valve is usually in a box buried in the ground close to the water meter, which is usually on the edge of your property near the street. If there is a leak on the water line outside your home, you may have to shut the water off at this location. Sometimes you can turn this valve off by hand, but you might need a "key" to turn it off. If you do not have the right tool handy, call your local water department or Atlanta Plumbing Plus to shut your water off for you.

Protecting Your Pipes

Even a tiny crack in a water line inside your home can cause you to lose more than 250 gallons of water a day. And if the main line to the home leaks you could waste more than 100 gallons of water a minute.

Heavy summer rains can make the ground around your pipes settle. This can cause your main supply line to the house to rupture and leak into the ground. It can even cause the supply line to pull apart at the house foundation, in which case the water might run back towards the house and flood your basement. Conversely, exceptionally dry summer weather and drought conditions can cause the same problems.

In the spring and fall, temperatures can change rapidly from one part of the day to another. This causes pipes to expand and contract, which may cause older galvanized pipes to leak.

Make sure you check your pipes at least once a year – including taking the following steps:

1. Open and close each of the shut-off valves for the water supply lines to your sinks, toilets, washing machine etc. This will prevent them from sticking when you need to use them.
2. Check for leaks on the supply lines to all of your appliances and fixtures (sinks, toilets, etc.) -- even those that are less visible, such as your dishwasher connection and icemaker supply line. If any of these supply lines are made of gray or blue poly piping, consider replacing them with stainless steel braided lines to prevent future leaks. Or, call Atlanta Plumbing Plus to do this for you.

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3. Look inside cabinets for sign of water damage such as warped cabinet bottoms, or water stains.
4. If the home has a basement, check exposed piping for signs of leaking, and don't forget to check the basement ceiling for water stains.
5. Check your washing machine hoses for bulges or leaks. Replace any hose showing signs of wear.
6. Turn on the water at several places in your home at once (e.g., in the bathtub and in the kitchen sink). If the volume of water from the faucets is reduced when more than one faucet is open, the pipes may have calcium and mineral deposits in them. You may need to replace the pipes.
7. Stop annoying water hammer noises by installing shock absorbers on the water lines.
8. Check whether there is a leak on the line outside your home by shutting the water off at the shut-off valve to the home then look to see if the meter dial is still turning.
9. Check to see if there is a leak inside your home by waiting until a time when no one will be using any water (for example, overnight). Read the number on your meter, then wait 8 – 10 hours and read it again. If the meter has moved, something could be leaking inside the home that needs to be repaired. Of course, the problem may not be in your water line. Read our "Tips for your Toilet" for more information.
10. One of the biggest causes of leaks in the home is high water pressure, which can cause toilets, faucets, and even your water heater to leak. You can buy a simple water pressure gauge at your local hardware store and test the water pressure at an outside faucet or hose bibb. If the water pressure is over 60 pounds per square inch (psi) contact Atlanta Plumbing Plus to install a pressure-reducing valve (PRV) to reduce the water pressure coming in to your home.

What to do in Winter

As winter approaches, make sure all of the pipes in your basement, crawl space, and attic are properly insulated to protect them from freeze breaks and reduce your energy bill.

When the temperature drops below freezing, turn on your faucets so that the water drips out just a little. Water that is moving will not freeze easily and the little bit of water you waste by letting the faucets drip is nothing in comparison to the amount you would waste if the pipes burst!

You can also reduce the likelihood of burst pipes during cold weather by leaving doors in kitchens, bathrooms and sink cabinets open to allow more heat to reach the plumbing. But, if your house is over a crawl space, close the vents under the house to prevent cold air from reaching the pipes. And, don't forget to seal leaks around doors and windows to reduce cold air penetration.



Also, don't forget your hose bibbs (outside faucets). If the water in them freezes and expands, not only will they be damaged, but the connecting lines inside your home may also freeze and break. Make sure your hose bibbs aren't dripping or leaking. If they are, call Atlanta Plumbing Plus to fix or repair them.

When, freezing weather is predicted, remove all hoses from the hose bibbs and shut off the water supply to them. If your hose bibbs do not have shut off valves, insulate them - and the piping to them - to prevent freeze breaks. You can buy faucet insulation kits at most home supply centers. You may also want to consider having frost-proof hose bibbs installed by Atlanta Plumbing Plus.

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What to do when Vacating the Home:

If you are leaving the house empty for a long period of time, shut off the main water line and drain the system by opening faucets at the highest and lowest points of the house. Make sure the heat is left on and set no lower than 55°F to prevent your pipes from freezing.

If your home will be vacant for many weeks or months during the winter, have Atlanta Plumbing Plus *professionally winterize* your home before you leave.

Even after all this preparation, if it is an exceptionally cold winter, your pipes could still freeze. If that happens, turn on your faucets and leave them on. Do not try to thaw a pipe with an open flame — call Atlanta Plumbing Plus instead.

If a pipe has burst, prevent more damage to your home by shutting off the water supply. Then call Atlanta Plumbing Plus to come and repair the pipe. Next, call your insurance company and, if possible, take photos of the damages. Most of all, if the break is near an electrical outlet or device, turn the electricity off at the breaker to avoid an electrical shock.