



Is Your Toilet Running? Managing Water Waste in Your Home

“There is no way I used that much water, or my toilet isn’t leaking!” I am sure operators and billing personnel have heard those lines a time or two. However, the customer is probably using that much water, and education is the best way to aid in the conservation of wasted water.

Are you wasting water unknowingly at your home or business? Do you know where to start or look to determine if you are, in fact, wasting water? There are many ways water can be costing you money not only through your utility bill, but also through the damage it is causing. Let’s look at some ways this can happen and learn a few helpful tips to involve and educate those who may not know.

Do you know where the shut-off valve or valves are? Just knowing some of these simple but important things can save you valuable time when a leak may occur. Do the shut-off valves work? Most shut-off valves are ball valve types, and some are gate valves. In today’s world, most systems are going to ball style valves for several reasons: ease of turning, meaning you only need to turn the valve 90 degrees to completely shut it off; and knowing that when the valve handle is in-line with the pipe it is in the open position. Gate valves, on the other hand, usually don’t get exercised or turned on and off enough, so when they are needed to function properly, there’s a chance they may eventually leak.



Here are a few ways that you may be wasting water: leaking pipes, dripping faucets or shower heads and running toilets – which account for about 75% or more of why water is being wasted. Leaking fittings and water heaters may also contribute to leaks.

It can sometimes be an easy fix if you are a do-it-yourselfer, or you may need to call the local plumber to have it done correctly. If you know you have a leaking faucet or shower head, it's a less stressful situation just replacing a worn-out gasket or replacing the Teflon tape on the threads. We all know that nothing lasts forever-as much as we'd would like to think so. If it's a dripping faucet, it may only need a new seal. A low-cost repair kit will have everything you need to fix the issue.

Probably the most common and sometimes hardest to detect is the running toilet. Most people don't realize how much water a runny toilet can waste in an hour, in a day or in a week. It's typical that a running toilet can use anywhere from 20-40 gallons an hour which is not out of the ordinary. A stuck flapper will allow a steady flow of water passing through and will be easy to detect. An easy way to check if water is passing by the flapper is to add a few drops of food coloring in the tank, let it sit for a half hour or so and then check the bowl. If color appears in the bowl, then you have a leaking flapper valve or corroded seal. You should start by checking the seal in which the flapper valve rests.

In many cases, the hardness of the water builds up and a simple cleaning will fix it. After cleaning the seal, replacing the flapper assures that the seal and the flapper are closing properly, especially if the flapper valve is old. I don't know how many times that I have found the flapper valve is the culprit in this situation. It's a cheap fix and will start saving money and provide peace of mind for you and your customers going forward.

In most of these situations one should start with shutting off the supply valve at each device to be repaired. Hopefully a valve is at each faucet or toilet, so the main valve isn't needed. As many operators have experience with these situations, homeowners often call on someone to shut the water off at the meter. If this does happen, which it will from time to time, politely explain to the homeowner that maybe they need to install a main shut-off valve if it doesn't have one and that it will benefit them if anything happens down the road. A lot of this is all based off educating your customers when these instances arise. It will also help you in your efforts to increase public relations and awareness for your customers.

Let's face it, with the rising cost of everything, including gas, water and electricity, why pay for something you didn't use? So, when you get home and have a minute or two, take time to assess the water system in your house and make sure you're doing your part to save water – and money – and not waste it.