

## How to Prevent Water Damage

### What are some causes of water damage?

Several modern-day conveniences can develop problems that lead to water damage. Some of the most common trouble spots are:

**Appliances** The most common source for water damage is the water heater, followed by the clothes washer, dishwasher, refrigerator ice makers, toilets, and the air conditioning unit. The age of an appliance is a major factor. For example, over time, water heaters rust on the bottom. Damage can be particularly heavy when the leaky water heater is located upstairs or in an attic.

**Hoses** Appliance hoses deteriorate from the inside out. Rubber hoses consist of two layers of rubber with a cloth fiber inside that deteriorates with time. Hoses with external stainless steel braided wire may cost as little as \$5 more than rubber-fiber hoses, but can be as much as 10 times less likely to fail.

**Pipes and Drains** Common problems include stoppages of toilets and drains (especially kitchen drains, where grease can build up), stoppages of garbage disposals, clogging of air conditioner lines, stoppages of drains from clothes washers due to lint accumulation, and deterioration and bursting of water lines to clothes washers. Roots in sewer lines cause problems as well. In addition, in older homes, cast iron and copper pipes are often installed next to each other. As the copper corrodes the cast iron, they will eventually break.

### How can you prevent or reduce water-related losses to your home?

1. Know where the main water shutoffs to your home are located. Also, install water shutoff valves on water lines under sinks and toilets, and leading to outside faucets.
2. React quickly to small leaks around water heaters, refrigerators, dishwashers, and other appliances before they become more troublesome ones.
3. Know—and follow—the recommended maintenance procedures for your appliances, such as periodically draining the water heater to clean out the sediment at the bottom of the tank.
4. Check clothes washer hoses for signs of deterioration, and replace hoses that show any evidence of cracking. Also, before you leave home for an extended period, shut off the water valve leading to the clothes washer.
5. Use plenty of water when operating garbage disposals so that waste is flushed out of the system.
6. Be aware of what goes down drains (grease, lint, and dirt in particular).
7. Don't wash heavy-duty dirt down drains, and don't put extremely dirty clothing in clothes washers. Instead, use a garden hose on the soiled item outside the house, so that the dirt

doesn't get into the drainage system inside the house.

8. When a problem does arise, hire an established contractor who has a good reputation.
9. When a plumber is at the house to make repairs, have him or her conduct a quick check on other appliances, drains, and pipes to ensure that everything is in proper working order.
10. Don't leave the room after you have turned on the water, especially full force, in the bathtub or a sink.
11. Consider buying a water detector. This relatively new product, similar to a smoke detector in function and in price, sounds an alarm when it detects a leak. They range in sophistication from simple models costing less than \$20 each to more elaborate alarms that can be tied into a central station. Placed on the floor near such items as water heaters and air conditioners, they could alert you to a leak before serious damage occurs.

**If you are building a new home or remodeling an older one, consider these suggestions:**

1. Install a floor drain for the laundry room and include a separate drain for the clothes washer. Should a problem occur, these drains would help to prevent damage to the rest of the house.
2. Because they are designed to pump very large volumes of water out in a hurry, new appliances such as dishwashers and clothes washers can quickly overload the drainage system in an older home. Therefore, have the drainage checked to confirm that it can handle the additional load.
3. Make sure contractors pay attention to clearances in case you need to remove water heaters and similar appliances in the future. In addition, allow adequate room inside walls so that plumbing repairs will be less difficult. Also, locate water lines in easily accessible areas that extend over the shortest possible distances throughout the home.
4. Consider purchasing your dealer's extended warranty. Periodic checks of an appliance and routine maintenance can help prevent a malfunction that could potentially cause major damage to your home.