



Your Healthy Home: Water Leaks 2

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In Water Leaks I, we talked about water leaks in your home. Let's continue our discussion by talking about steps you can take to minimize the chance of water damage, and how you can conserve water. Even if you have a spring or well, the water supply is not endless, and lots of water usage or hidden leaks can put a strain on your water pump equipment.

Even brand new homes can develop a water leak. One new home that we had finished up about 2 months earlier is an example - the homeowner decided to run the water pressure up another 10 PSI. This resulted in several leaks from faucet pipes under sinks - the plumbing contractor had not tightened these completely and it didn't show up until the higher pressure was applied. When inspecting new construction, I take considerable time to really test all of the fixtures for this reason.

Last week we talked about what you can do to inspect your home for leaks and seepages, and that some of these can be hidden. This is particularly true if your home has a crawlspace. While from an inspector's point of view a crawlspace is wonderful because we can SEE everything that is going on, from a homeowner's point of view crawlspaces are not that fun! They are hard to get into and inevitably have an assortment of creatures from spiders to mice to deal with as we move on our hands and knees towards the pump, water heater, or air handler. I still have not figured out why a builder really believes you'd rather trade space for a water heater for a clothes closet if you have to go into a dark crawlspace to service your water heater! At any rate, what the crawlspace is good for is looking for plumbing leaks! So in addition to the other checklist items I mentioned, go into your crawlspace if you have one, or find an adventurous teenager to go in there and LOOK and LISTEN for drips. Unless you do this, you will never know about these leaks until the next tradesperson goes in there.

Is there anything you can do proactively, besides regular inspections, to stave off a day when water gets out of piping and damages something in your home? You would think that in our day and age of modern devices and electronics that someone would think of this. Well they have - and in a variety of forms.

These alarm devices come in two varieties. One is a passive system that sits on the floor near the fixture, such as behind your toilet or under the refrigerator, and sets off an alarm if it senses moisture. These are inexpensive and easy to install. They can be battery operated for simplicity. The problem with these is that they depend upon someone hearing the alarm and turning the water off. What if you are not home?

A better system, but more expensive, is the active detection system. This device will detect a leak AND actually shut off the water flow to the appliance. This system needs to be installed by a professional, since it involves putting a valve in-line with the appliance. Better still is a whole house active leak and shutoff system. This works by having either a wired or wireless sensor at every appliance, communicating with a central brain connected to a water shutoff valve for your entire home. This is installed much like a home security system, with a connection to an alarm system if you have one.

These systems can get very sophisticated and there are numerous products to choose from. You should consult a qualified plumber for more information if you decide to install these products; some home alarm installers also provide these systems.