



Your Healthy Home: Water Leaks

Lisa Turner

Water leaks are the bane of every home owner. I have heard true life horror stories of people leaving their home to go on a cruise or vacation only to get a call from a neighbor who says that water is running out their front door. I saw icicles stretching down from the second story siding where the pipes froze and burst inside a cabin retreat once when I arrived for an inspection!

Are you water aware? What do you do when you leave your home for an extended period of time? Most of us, if we are leaving for many days, turn the water off where it enters the home, or sometimes outside or in the crawlspace at the well pump. But when you think about it, we could leave for work and have a burst or leaking pipe do the same amount of damage as leaving for days at a time.

No, I'm not trying to give you nightmares, although the scenarios above are pretty scary. Here are some tips for making sure the insurance company does not get a call from you anytime soon about flooding. Even if you do not have water that "escapes" the system on to your floors, you can still have leaks internally in appliances that run your water bill up, or consume running time on your well pump. For example, a toilet that leaks internally (flapper not seated) can waste over 200 gallons of water a day.

First, know where your water shutoff is. Make sure everyone in the house knows where it is. This way, in an emergency, you can cut it off quickly. Second, take a look at all of your water gulping appliances. Are there shutoffs nearby? Most appliances - especially toilets and faucets - have their own shutoff valve so that maintenance is possible. These valves themselves can leak.

Second, take the time every couple of months to look under sinks for seepage. Check the shower head where it meets the arm coming out of the wall (as a home inspector, I find leaks here all the time - if left unchecked, these will grow and spray water above the shower enclosure), look behind your laundry appliances, the bottom of your refrigerator and dishwasher, and around the faucets in your shower and sinks - sometimes these will seep from the base of the fixture. Water dripping from your shower faucets can seep behind the fixture and damage walls - if you see any dripping from the faucet handle, you should have it repaired.

Take a good look at where the water is running during a shower - if there is any possibility that water can run into cracks in tile or behind the tub faucet, caulk these areas. Check tile thoroughly - small cracks can develop over time and allow water to run in under the shower pan.

Third, check your toilets. Toilets can leak without making noise - but first take the toilet tank cover off and take a good listen. 90% of the time, if you have a leak in the toilet internals, you will hear it. It might be a slight hissing, or just the sound of intermittent drips. Non-leaking toilets will be completely silent. If you are unsure, put a few drops of food coloring in the tank (not the bowl). If the color shows up in the bowl, your flapper valve at the bottom of the tank is leaking. These are easy to replace and cost just a few dollars.

Next week: water leaks continued - should you buy a water alarm (leak detection) device?

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