

Home Leak Detection

Water leaks in your home can literally drain money out of your wallet. Finding or narrowing down where a water leak may be occurring can also help save money on a professional who would charge you for the time to locate the leak. Just know that not all of the leak detection techniques highlighted in this article will find all leaks, but even finding an approximate location of your home leak will help your hired professional finish the job more efficiently.

Hot Water Tanks

Check the pressure relief valve on your hot water tank. Sometimes these valves are plumbed directly into a drain and can leak without you knowing. Take care to avoid being scalded when working around your hot water heater. If you can, remove the drainpipe to check for a leak by listening. A “hissing” sound would indicate a leak.

Important! If you suspect the leak is in your water heater – call an expert. **NEVER** stick a screwdriver in there – it is very dangerous and you could cross wires or puncture the tank.

In-Home Water Meter

If your water meter is located in your home you can check the meter to see if you have a leak in your home (if you have an outside meter pit, please see the next paragraph). First locate your meter – it is usually located in your basement. To check for a leak using your meter, first make sure that no water is being used in the house – this includes washing machines, dish washers, sprinkler systems, showers, faucets or toilets. You may also turn off your master water shut off valve. Most meters have a low flow indicator (usually a little red triangle on the meter face). If the low flow indicator on your meter is spinning – even slowly – water is going through the meter and you may have a leak somewhere in your home. The next step is to locate it; toilets are always a good place to start.

Toilets

Leaking toilets are frequently the culprit for in-home leaks. To check for a leaky toilet, first remove the top off of the tank and listen closely. If you hear hissing, try to locate where it is coming from. If you are able to locate the leak you will need to assess whether you can fix it yourself or call a plumber.

If you don't see anything noticeable, put a couple of drops of food coloring into the tank (not the bowl) and wait several minutes. If you see colored water in the bowl – you have a leak in the flapper located at the bottom of the tank, which is allowing water to seep through. If you feel comfortable, you can make the repair yourself, or call a plumber.

It is a good idea to test all of the toilets in your home just to make sure you don't have a problem with more than one.

Outside Meter Line

If your toilets don't show signs of leaking go ahead and check the line running from the house to the curb stop or to an outside meter pit (if you don't have an inside meter). Locating an outside leak can save you money if you can locate the leak for the plumber.

If your meter is located in a pit, do not enter or try to open the pit. You may walk the area between the meter pit or curb stop and your home and look for obvious signs of a leak, such as: soft muddy areas and/or grass that is greener than or growing much faster than other areas. If you see such an obvious sign, call the plumber or assess to see if you can make a repair yourself. If the leak appears to extend past the meter pit, please contact your rural water system.

Hose Bibs/ Outdoor Faucets

If you suspect the leak is near the house, you will need to locate all the hose-bibs (hose-bibs are the faucets located on the outside of your home that you hook your garden hoses to). Usually an average residence has one hose-bib in the front and one in the back, but be sure to locate all of the hose bibs on your residence. (Be sure to unhook garden hoses from hose-bibs in the winter so they can drain and not freeze).



Once you have located your hose-bibs, take a screwdriver (preferably one long enough to give yourself room to work), and put the metal tip of the screwdriver directly on the metal part of the hose-bib. Put your ear to the plastic handle of screwdriver, (in this manner the solid screwdriver works like a stethoscope) and carefully listen for sounds emanating from the hose-bib. If you hear any sound be sure to mark that hose-bib. If the sound seems to be louder at any of the other hose-bibs, then the leak is closer to that unit and you should make sure and note that when you call your plumber. This technique also works for yard hydrants.

If you listen to all the hose-bibs and still find no sound, go into the house and follow the same process with the screwdriver on your house fittings such as faucets in sinks, shower valves, washer and hot water heater. If you are still not sure, just contact a plumber.

WARNING! If you do find the leak and decide to try and dig it up please make sure you do a “One Call” (dial 811) so that you don't dig up any utility lines and cause yourself physical or financial harm. If you are not sure, call an expert or your local plumber.