



Water Heater Maintenance Can Save a Bundle

By Stanley J. Collini

Water heaters are often easily ignored and most of us pay little attention to them until something goes wrong. By using some common sense and following a few tips, the life of these appliances can be extended and kept operating at peak efficiency.

Small problems can lead to big problems, even collateral water damage – the insurance industry’s second largest claim category. Also, recognize your limits and know when it’s time to call in a professional. Water heaters can be dangerous if you don’t know what you are doing, so always work cautiously.

Get to know your water heater by first determining whether it is electrically powered or gas fired. Commercial water heaters are similar to residential heaters but they’re often larger, more powerful, and they have larger pipes and fittings connecting to the plumbing system.

If your business has a gas water heater, it will generally provide about 12-years of service, but you can extend its life by performing regular maintenance. Every six months you should partially drain the heater’s tank (more often if you have hard water). This practice prevents sediment build-up, which can make your water heater work harder and shorten its life. If your water heater makes noises that sound like gravel in a clothes dryer, you probably have mineral sediment in the tank. Sediment is usually caused by hard water and over time it can corrode the lining of the water tank. Here are the steps to take when draining water and sediment from the tank:

- Turn the pilot knob off and shut off the gas supply to the water heater.
- Turn off the cold water supply valve that feeds water to the unit. This valve resembles an outside faucet and it’s located on a pipe leading into the top of the water heater.
- Attach the water hose to the drain valve near the bottom of the unit. Run the hose to a nearby floor drain, into a bucket or even outside. CAUTION: They don’t call it a water heater for nothing. The water draining from the tank will be very hot so take precautions to protect yourself.
- Carefully open the drain valve and let the water drain out of the tank until it runs clear (It may take several gallons before the water clears).

- Close the valve then turn on the cold water supply and allow the tank to refill with water.
- Turn on the gas supply valve and quickly light the pilot by following directions on the heater’s instruction plate.

The flue (vent) and burner ports on the gas water heater should be cleaned

annually. A clogged flue can prevent toxic carbon monoxide gases from venting outside, leaving them to back up into your building. Professionals should handle this level of maintenance.

Like gas heaters, electric water heaters should have water and sediment drained from the tank every six months. Follow

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