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Home Water Efficiency: Fixing Leaks Indoors and Out

Leaks are responsible for wasting tremendous amounts of water and energy. A leaky toilet can waste 200 gallons of water per day and are notorious for high water and sewer bills and overloaded septic tanks. A dripping faucet can waste 3,000 gallons of water a year or enough water to take a shower every day for four months. That's a lot of water. The good news is that it is easy to check for and even repair some types of leaks yourself.



Source: EPA WaterSense

Hello water meter!

- ✓ If you are billed for water based on use, you have a water meter. Water meters ensure that you are only paying for what you use, assist water companies with accounting for any lost water between the water source and your home, and are a great tool to assist you with identifying leaks. In New Hampshire, most water meters are located inside the home in the basement. To get an idea whether there are any leaks in your home that have gone unnoticed, such as a silent toilet leak or a leak in your irrigation system, take a meter reading, wait two hours, and take another reading. Refrain from using any water in between readings. If the meter reading changes, you have a leak.

Nice to meet you, bill.

- ✓ Some water bills include information on how much water you use each month and even provide comparisons to the previous month and year usage. If you notice a jump in usage when reviewing your water bill, you might have a leak. If your water provider does not include this information in your bill, request that they make the change.
- ✓ Another way to get an idea whether you have a leak is to consider that a 2008 water use study on the seacoast of New Hampshire found that indoor water use is approximately 63 gallons per day per capita, while summer use is approximately 93 gallons per day per capita. If you multiply the number of people in your house by one of these numbers you will have an estimate of how much water you should expect to use each day. If your water bill is above this number, you may have a leak.

Check you later.

- ✓ Check your faucets to see if they drip or if water comes out of places it should not. Old and worn faucet washers and gaskets frequently cause leaks in faucets.

- ✓ Inspect other household pipes, fittings and valves for leaks. If you find leaks, don't ignore them—make the repair or call a plumber if you don't know how.
- ✓ Check the shower for leaks near the showerhead and at the tub spout when the shower is on and off. Leaks where the pipe stem meets the showerhead can normally be fixed by unscrewing the showerhead, placing pipe tape around the threads on the pipe stem, and screwing the showerhead back on tightly. Leaks from the tub spout will probably require replacement of the spout.
- ✓ Leaky toilets waste a lot of water and cost a lot in bills. Unfortunately, many toilet leaks go undetected, but the good news is that it is easy to check for a leak by dropping food coloring (12 drops) or a leak detector dye tablet in the tank. Do not flush for 15 or 20 minutes. If the tank leaks, the dye will show up in the bowl. Old and worn toilet flappers are often the culprit and are very easy to replace.

Meet you out back.

- ✓ Check your hose for any leaks. If the hose is leaking where it is screwed into the spigot, replace the hose washer, place pipe tape around the threads of the spigot, and screw the hose back on tightly with a wrench. If your hose has a leak somewhere else, you have a few options. If it is a small leak, you may be able to patch it with tape or a patch kit. If it is a larger leak you can purchase a hose repair kit at your local hardware store.
- ✓ A leak in your irrigation system can cost you a lot in water bills and result in property damage. To locate leaks, turn the irrigation system on and walk the system. Check sprinkler heads to make sure they are working properly and that there are no geysers or puddles beneath. Also, puddled water, soggy spots in the yard, or runoff onto pavement could indicate a leak or over watering. Have your system inspected by a professional irrigation installer. For more information about checking your irrigation system for leaks or inefficiencies, read the fact sheet “Home Water Efficiency: In-Ground Irrigation Systems,” at <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/dwgb/index.htm> and scroll to WD-DWGB-26-22.

Go to the EPA WaterSense website at www.epa.gov/watersense/our_water/howto.html to learn more about how to fix leaks yourself.

For Additional Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov, or visit the DES Water Conservation Program webpage by going to www.des.nh.gov, clicking on the “A to Z” list and scrolling down to “Water Conservation.”

References and Resources:

U.S. EPA WaterSense Program, www.epa.gov/watersense

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of March 2013. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.