



WATER  HEATER
MAINTENANCE

ALL AMERICAN

WATER HEATER MAINTENANCE GUIDE

We rarely think about our water heaters until we run out of hot water. During winter your water heater works harder than any other time of the year. In order to keep your water heater performing at its peak, we have compiled a list of six routine maintenance steps to follow.

1. FLUSH THE SYSTEM:

Throughout the year sediment will collect inside your water heater. Sediment buildup can slow the heat transfer between the gas burner and the water by forming into a thin, insulating layer at the bottom of your tank. Additionally, sediment and other debris create an environment conducive for the development of corrosive bacteria that will reduce the efficiency and lifespan of your water heater.

To flush the water heater follow these steps:

- **Step 1:** Turn off electricity to the unit and let it cool.
- **Step 2:** Drain several gallons of water from the tank by opening the faucet near the bottom. If there is not a drain in the floor near the tank, you will need to connect a water hose to the faucet before you begin.
- **Step 3:** Place the other end of the hose in a five-gallon bucket and inspect the drained water for sediment.
- **Step 4:** If there is an excess amount of sediment you may need to fill and drain the water heater again.

Make sure you consult your owner's manual or the manufacturer's website for specific instructions for your particular unit.

[Click here](#) to watch a video tutorial on flushing a water heater, from *This Old House*.



2. TEST THE PRESSURE RELEASE VALVE:

The pressure release valve on your water heater opens to release pressure build up in your unit. If there is a buildup of sediment, rust, and other corrosive materials, it can cause the pressure release valve to malfunction.

To test the pressure release valve, carefully lift the lever and allow it to snap back into place. If the valve is working properly, a burst of hot water should be released into the drain pipe. If it is not working properly, you should call a professional to have the valve replaced.

Caution: Be very careful and attentive when testing the pressure release valve as the water released will be very hot. Additionally, if your unit is more than five years old, and the pressure release valve has never been tested, testing it could actually cause a leak. If this is the case for your water heater, be sure to consult a licensed professional before testing the unit.

3. CHECK THE TEMPERATURE SETTING:

For optimal performance your water heater should be set at 120°F. If set higher or lower your home's energy efficiency will be compromised and the unit's lifespan will be shortened. If you find that your water is not hot enough even with the unit set to the optimal temperature, you should consult a professional.



4. CHECK THE SACRIFICIAL ANODE ROD

One of the most important components of your water heater is the sacrificial anode rod. Made of either magnesium or aluminum, the sacrificial anode rod prevents the tank from rusting by being consumed itself.

To test the sacrificial anode rod, drain a few gallons of water from the tank (utilizing the same process as when you flush the water heater), and unscrew the rod from the tank using a 1 1/16th-inch socket. You can find the exact location of the rod's hex head by consulting your owner's manual or the manufacturer's website. If the rod has dwindled to less than 1/2 of its thickness, or has become coated with calcium, you will need to replace it. [This Old House](#) has an excellent instructional video for replacing the sacrificial anode rod.

Proper inspection and maintenance can extend the life of your water heater and reduce the risk of untimely water damage. If you are uncomfortable with some of the testing methods for your unit, or it has been a long time since maintenance was performed on your water heater, be sure to call a professional and licensed plumber before your unit fails.

5. INSULATE WATER HEATER

Especially during the colder months, wrap your water heater in an insulating blanket. Additionally, wrap exposed pipes with pipe insulation. This can reduce heat loss by 40%, and reduce your energy bill by as much as 5%. Be careful to use only designated insulatation, as anything else is a fire hazzard.

6. MAINTAIN PROPER CLEARANCE

Water heaters are often located in areas of our homes that are prime for storing seldom used items. It is very important to remember to maintain at least two feet of clearance around your water heater at all times. This buffer will reduce the risk of fire and maintain proper airflow to your unit.

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