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## Don't Get Steamed: Have your Water Heater Serviced in the Fall

*Angie's List recommends inspection before cold weather sets in*

You'd think the third-largest energy hog in your home would demand its share of attention, but not the lowly water heater. It generally stands alone in its corner, gathering dust and dutifully heating water on demand. What most homeowners don't realize is that silent silo could be draining their wallets with every steamy shower or load of dishes.

Maintained properly, water heaters will last for years and deliver gallon after gallon of hot water. Left alone, they'll quickly lose efficiency, sucking dollars out of your wallet with every degree of heat. A nationwide poll of Angie's List ([www.angieslist.com](http://www.angieslist.com)) members found that more than 70 percent of members have never had their water heater serviced. One in four members admit they don't know what temperature their heaters are programmed to seek.

"As with any appliance, maintenance is key in expanding the life span of your water heater and just before the cold weather hits is an ideal time to do so," said Angie Hicks, founder of Angie's List, the nation's leading provider of consumer ratings on local service companies. "If your water heater is more than 10 years old, it's probably operating at less than 50 percent of its efficiency. An inspection of your water heater can also detect other problems, like a carbon monoxide leak."

A carbon monoxide leak from a water heater at a Virginia Tech off-campus apartment building sickened 23 people in 2007. A working carbon monoxide detector likely spared their lives from the odorless, deadly gas.

Angie's List contacted its highly rated water heater specialists to get some tips for the winter months. One common suggestion was for homeowners to locate their main water shutoff valve in case they need to shut off the water in an emergency.

"Consider putting a marker in the ground next to your water shutoff valve in your yard," Hicks said. "Freezing weather can lead to bursting pipes and an immediate need to shut off the water. One of our members shared a story where a pipe froze and burst in his home and he found himself running around his snowy yard at 6 a.m. – barefoot in his pajamas – trying to locate the shut-off valve, all the while water was showering the inside of his home."

"Also, if you are going to be away for an extended period of time during the winter months, turn off the water at the main valve, along with the power source to the water heater," Hicks said. "Owners of gas heaters might require a professional to come out and relight the heater upon their return."

You can reduce your monthly water heating bills by selecting the appropriate water heater for your home. While storage units are the most popular type of water heating systems, tankless systems offer energy savings by providing hot water only when it's needed. Another cost-effective way to generate hot water for your home is through the use of solar water heaters.

"You're going to pay more for a higher energy-efficient water heater," Hicks said. "But you'll save more money in the long run on your water heating bills than if you purchase a less efficient system."

#### Angie's 4 tips for hiring a company to install a water heater:

- **Stay cool:** The need for a water heater replacement generally arises when the hot water stops flowing, making it an emergency situation. Rather than hire the first company you find in the yellow pages, take an hour to call around and compare prices and service. If you can hold out until normal business hours, you will avoid the after-hours emergency service charge.
- **Consider the options:** Talk to companies about new innovations and systems that could increase your energy efficiency. Spending a little more on the unit may pay off in monthly energy savings if you plan to be in your home for 5 or more years.
- **Don't over invest:** If you plan to sell your home in the near future, don't spend a lot on a fancy system. A water heater is considered standard when purchasing a home. Like furnaces and roofs, a new water heater may be appealing to potential buyers, but it's probably not going to increase your asking price.
- **Understand the process:** Replacing a water heater can be cumbersome and involve many gallons of water. Make sure you know how it will be done. The units are very heavy and navigating small staircases can cause damage to your home. Check that your company is insured to cover any damages.

#### 4 ways to increase water heater efficiency:

- **Use low-flow faucets and shower heads** throughout your home to decrease the amount of water, and energy, used. This will make your tank of hot water go farther.
- **Check that your water heater tank and pipes are properly insulated.** But, don't cover the tank thermostat.
- **Lower your water heater base temperature** to 120 degrees. Your shower will still be steamy and you will save energy on heating the water.
- **Drain a quart of water from your water heater tank** every 3 months to remove sediment that slows down heat transfer and lowers the efficiency of your heater. Follow the proper steps suggested by your manufacturer since the type of tank you have can determine the best procedure.

*\*2,312 Angie's List members took our poll. Responses are representative of Angie's List members, but not the general public.*

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*Angie's List is where thousands of consumers share their ratings and reviews on local contractors and companies in more than 340 different categories. Currently, more than 650,000 consumers across the U.S. rely on Angie's List to help them find the right contractor or company for the job they need done. Members have unlimited access to the list via Internet or phone; receive the Angie's List magazine, which includes articles on home improvement and maintenance, consumer trends and scam alerts; and they can utilize the Angie's List complaint resolution service. Get more information about Angie's List at <http://www.angieslist.com>. Read Angie's blog at <http://www.angiehicksblog.com>.*