

## **FIX IT UP!**

*Bruce Turner*

### Are You in Hot Water?

Do you find yourself standing there by the shower, waiting for the water to get hot? Does it seem to take longer than it used to? Do your water temperature and pressure seem lower?

It could be that your water heater needs some TLC. Water heaters can accumulate sediment, especially in hard water, so you should flush your unit periodically. You'll improve its efficiency and probably double its useful life.

It's an easy job. Turn off the water heater and close the water supply valve. At the bottom of the unit there's a drain cock with a hose thread. Just connect a garden hose to the drain, open the pressure relief valve (otherwise, you create a vacuum and the tank won't drain), and then open the drain cock and let the water pour out through the hose. Prepare to be horrified, because what you'll see coming out of the tank will be pretty disgusting.

When the tank is empty, leave the drain open, turn on the water supply and run fresh water through the tank until the water coming out of the hose is clear. Then close the drain, detach the hose, close the pressure relief valve and turn the water heater back on. When it refills, you'll be bathing and washing dishes in much cleaner hot water.

Another great move is to use a water heater blanket – it's a fiberglass insulation blanket that can dramatically reduce the amount of energy needed to keep that water hot. Most new water heaters have excellent insulation, but many older units could use some swaddling. You can buy a blanket and install it yourself in a couple of minutes. It's an easy, inexpensive way of saving energy costs and helping your water heater live longer.

But if that lifespan has run out, don't despair. Good-quality water heaters start at only about \$350, going higher from there depending on the length of the warranty.

If you're handy, you can install the new unit yourself with basic plumbing tools. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully, and follow the codes exactly. Water heaters can build up pressure and explode with tremendous force, so make sure the pressure relief valve is functioning properly. And be careful that the valve terminates outside your home, down and away from the house where it can spew hot water in a safe place where no one will be scalded. I've actually seen pressure relief valves positioned in areas where people walk. That could cause serious injuries if the valve belches hot water at the wrong moment.

If it's a gas heater, make sure the burner is vented to the outside, to release carbon monoxide. And, of course, make sure your new water heater is properly strapped to the wall so it'll stay vertical in an earthquake.

Say what? You don't feel like installing and strapping a new water heater, or flushing and wrapping your old one? Well, there's some hot new technology that offers some very cool alternatives for you. Drop by this column next time and I'll fill you in.

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