



## Keeping Your Money from Going down the Drain

By Tom Lienhard, PE, CEM

Like other home appliances and electronics, water heaters have become more efficient with new types of units such as tankless, solar and heat pump technologies becoming popular. But, if you don't need to upgrade your existing water heater yet, there are a few easy steps you can take to save energy now.

- Install aerating, low-flow faucets and showerheads, and limit your showers to less than 10 minutes.
- Repair leaky faucets promptly. A leaky faucet wastes gallons of water in a short period of time.
- Lower the thermostat on your water heater to 120°F, which provides comfortable hot water for most uses.
- If you are in the market for a new dishwasher or clothes washer, consider buying an efficient, water-saving Energy Star model to reduce hot water use.

To save additional energy with your water heater, the U.S. Department of Energy also recommends that you should:

- Insulate as much of the hot and cold water pipes connected to the water heater as possible.
- Install heat traps on the hot and cold pipes at the water heater to prevent heat loss, if your unit doesn't already have them. Heat traps allow cold water to flow into the water heater tank but prevent unwanted hot-water flow out of the tank.
- Drain a quart of water from your water tank every three months to remove sediment that impedes heat transfer and lowers the efficiency of your heater. The type of water tank you have determines the steps to take, so follow the manufacturer's advice.
- Insulate your electric water storage tank, but be careful not to cover the thermostat. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Insulate your natural gas water storage tank, but be careful not to cover the top, bottom, thermostat, or burner compartment. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations; when in doubt, get professional help.

Although most water heaters last 10–15 years, it's best to start shopping now for a new one if yours is more than seven years old. Doing some research before your heater fails will enable you to select one that most appropriately meets your needs.

To save additional money, check with your local energy provider on energy efficiency rebates they may offer. Also, state rebates and federal tax credits may be available for energy efficiency upgrades to your home.

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