

This fact sheet will help you identify and locate water leaks in your home or business. Repairing water leaks is a great way to reduce the use of water that's just being wasted.

### **It's Only a Small Drip...Right?**

Slow drips of water can add up quickly. A toilet that "keeps running" after you flush or a sink that drips after it is turned off can waste thousands of gallons of water a year. If the drip is hot water, you are paying for wasted energy too. Fix leaks as soon as you find them. They won't go away on their own.

### **A "Running" Toilet Leak**

Toilet leaks can range from small to large, constant or random. Many are even silent. Even a small, silent leak can easily waste \$50 per year in water and sewer costs. Large leaks can waste much more. Fortunately, most toilet leaks are relatively easy to fix. In a properly functioning toilet, no water should move from the tank to the bowl, unless the toilet is being flushed. A leaking toilet loses water from the tank to the bowl without being flushed.

### **How to Conserve Water**

- Install a 1.6 gallon toilet
- Buy a water-efficient washing machine
- Repair leaks
- Reduce water use in the yard and garden
- Wash full loads
- Minimize shower time
- Reduce faucet water use
- Don't waste water outdoors

### **Checking for a leaky toilet:**

1. Remove the tank lid. (Don't worry, this water is clean until it enters the bowl.)
2. Add some food coloring or a dye tablet to turn the water a different color. Put the tank lid back on.
3. After about 30 minutes, look in the bowl. If you see colored water, you have a leak. If the water is clear, water is not leaking from the tank to the bowl.

If you do have a leak, there are a number of possible causes. If you remove the tank lid and can easily identify the cause, correct the problem and try your leak test again. Consider that "fixes" such as bending the float back to shape, or adjusting how the rubber flapper falls, often end up failing soon afterward. In most cases, you will simply want to replace the toilet flapper (the rubber thing at the bottom of the tank that keeps water in the tank) and/or the filling mechanism. These are available at hardware stores and home centers for about \$8 each.

### **Leaking Faucets**

A leaking faucet is frequently the result of a bad rubber washer. The washer on a sink is typically located under the handle. A washer is relatively easy to replace, if you have the right tools. It does require shutting off the water under the faucet, and removing the handle. Check local home centers or the Internet (keywords "repairing leaky faucets") for instructions on how to repair faucet leaks. If you don't feel comfortable doing the repair yourself, a plumber may be your best option. Remember, even if you have to pay a plumber to fix the leak, you will end up saving money in the long run.

### **Water Softeners**

Water softeners can get stuck on during a recharge and use several hundred gallons. This may be hard to find as most recharges occur in the middle of the night. You can utilize the spreadsheet on the next page to track your water usage and help determine if this may be causing the high water usage.

## Checking Your Meter for Mysterious Water Leaks

1. Locate the water meter. It should be near the street under a metal, plastic, or concrete lid. The water meter is your indicator of water use. When water is not being used, nothing on the meter should be moving. Water meters have numbers or spinning dials, which record usage. Most meters also have a small “leak detector” arrow, which senses the lower volumes of water common with leaks.

2. Turn off every water-using item inside and outside the home or building.

3. Check the meter. Watch the meter for a minute or more. If the leak detector dial or arrow is moving, you have a leak. In some cases, it may move back and forth very slightly, as water pressure in the street fluctuates. If it moves forward continually, even at a slow rate, you have a leak. You may also want to check the main meter reading (numbers) at a set time, and then come back an hour later, after you know no water has been used. If it has a higher reading, there is a leak. If you suspect a toilet may be the culprit, turn the water off from the toilet shut-off valve (on the wall, under the toilet) and check the meter again.

4. If you still can't locate the leak, find the shut-off valve for your home or building. It can be indoors or outdoors, but should be near the location where the water line enters the building. If you don't know where the shut-off valve is, follow a straight line from the water meter to your building, and look for it. If you have a very large building, it is possible you have more than one main shut-off valve.

5. Confirm the location of the leak. If the main shut-off is closed and the meter has stopped, the leak is not between the meter and the building. If the meter still runs with the main water shut off, your leak is between the meter and the building. Since outdoor leaks are relatively rare, be sure to double-check that all indoor fixtures and outdoor hose and irrigation lines are off. Call a plumber to fix underground outdoor leaks.

### Have a High Bill, But Don't See a Leak?

Sometimes you may have a leak and not even know it. The best indication will be a high bill compared to past use or compared to how much water your neighbors may be using.

There are often two reasons for mysterious water leaks: a leaking toilet or a leak between the meter and the house. A leaking toilet is more likely to be the cause. Outdoor leaks are rare. The first step is to determine whether you actually have a leak, or are just using more water than you expected. Many customers are surprised how much water can be used for activities such as watering the lawn. Below are directions for checking for mysterious water leaks.

