

Water Heater Maintenance Assures Long Life

Cleaning dishes, washing hands and taking showers are a few of the ways we depend on water heaters for our daily needs. Whether gas or electric, water heaters are generally very reliable and quiet. Water heaters can last several years if properly maintained.

Three basic types of water heaters are manufactured – gas, electric and on-demand. Gas and electric models are essentially a tank with a heating source that stores heated water until needed. On-demand units heat the water as it is used.

Gas water heaters have a glass-lined tank surrounded by insulation, a dip tube on the cold water inlet pipe, a hot water outlet, a sacrificial anode, a temperature and pressure relief valve (T&P), a gas burner and a vent. Electric water heaters are much like gas heaters, except the heating source consists of two electric elements. Electric heaters typically come in two styles: glass-lined steel tank and plastic tank.

Annual maintenance should include draining the tank to remove sediment and exercising the T&P valve. The amount of sediment in your tank will depend on your water quality. To drain the tank, follow these steps:

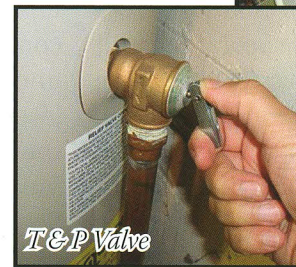
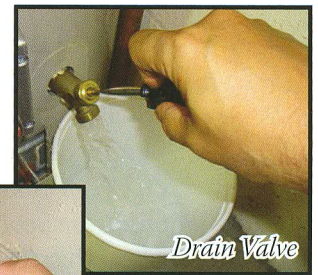
1. Turn the gas burner to “pilot” or the circuit breaker to off if electric.
2. Connect a garden hose to the drain valve at the bottom of the tank.
3. Turn off the cold water supply to the heater and carefully open the T&P valve by lifting the lever.
4. Open the drain valve at the bottom of the heater (be careful of hot water coming from the hose). When the hose runs clear, you are done.

If there is a large amount of sediment in the tank, it may not flow out through the drain valve. Draining the tank completely and replacing the valve with a full-port ball valve will make sediment removal easier. To refill the tank, close the drain valve, close the relief valve, open a hot water faucet and turn the cold water supply back on. When the water runs clear from the faucet, turn the burner/breaker back on. Always follow the manufacturer’s recommendations for maintenance.

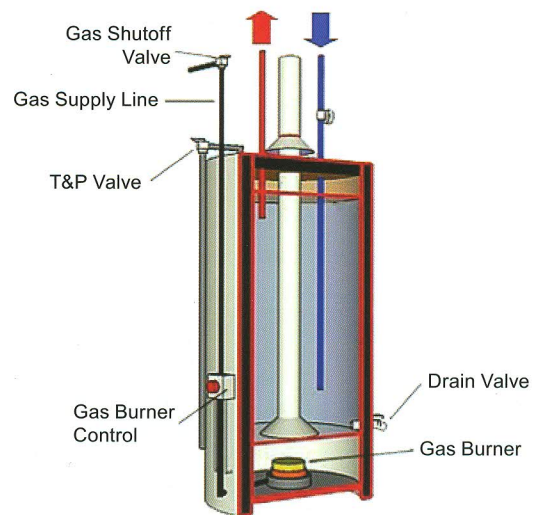
Other basic maintenance includes inspection of the vent on gas models to make sure it is aligned properly and checking the piping connections and area under the heater for signs of leaks. A drip pan can be installed under the heater to catch any water that might result from a leak. Lowering the temperature setting on glass-lined electric and gas models will also help prolong the life of the tank.

More advanced maintenance includes replacement of electric elements, replacement of the sacrificial anode (plastic lined tanks do not have anodes). Check your water heater manual or online sources for more information.

Material based on content from Bob Formisano, Guide to the Home Repair Site at About.com, article http://homerepair.about.com/od/plumbingrepairs/ss/hwh_maintenance.htm and http://homerepair.about.com/od/plumbingrepair/ss/hwh_tank_gas.htm



Gas Water Heater



Marathon Electric Water Heater

