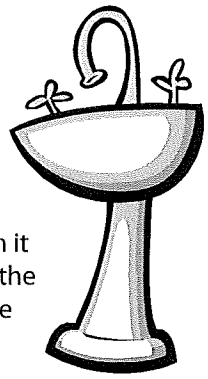
EPA832-F-09-004

Fix a Leak Week Family Fact Sheet

Fix a Leak Week, sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense® program, takes place in March. It's a time when families are encouraged to check for water leaks and drips in bathrooms, kitchens, and yards at home.

What Is WaterSense?

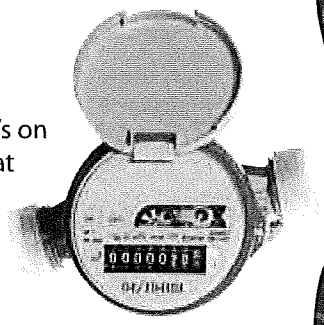


The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA for short, is the part of our nation's government that helps to protect the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land where we live. EPA's WaterSense program encourages Americans to use only the water they need and avoid wasting this precious resource. This concept, known as "water efficiency," is important because the more people there are on the planet, the more strain it puts on limited water supplies. In fact, from 1950 to 2000, the number of people living in the United States doubled, while the demand for water more than tripled. Using only what we need helps keep this growing thirst for water in check.

The Facts on Leaks:

- Did you know that, in a year, water leaks in your home can waste enough water to fill a backyard swimming pool? And if we added up all the water leaking in people's homes right now it could fill a trillion gallons of milk jugs? That's enough water for all the people living in the cities Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami combined.
- Water-wasting leaks include running toilets, dripping faucets, and other leaking pipes around your home. Most of these leaks can be fixed easily.
- Fixing these leaks can save your family more than 10 percent on water bills. That's like saving $1 for every $10 spent on water.

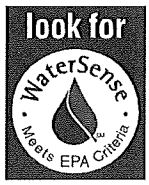
Finding Leaks:



- Ask your parents to help you find the water meter on your house. Usually, it's on the outside of the house in a box or under a metal cover on the sidewalk that says "Water." The numbers in the box represent either gallons or cubic feet of water used in your home. Check your meter, then don't flush the toilet, run the faucet, or use any water for two hours. At the end of the two hours, check the water meter again. If the meter does not read exactly the same, you probably have a leak.
- Walk through your house listening for running toilets and looking for drips. Drips usually mean leaks.
- Find out if your toilet is leaking silently by placing a drop of food coloring in the toilet tank (that's the area behind the toilet seat—ask for mom or dad's help to remove the lid). If color shows up in the toilet bowl after 15 minutes without flushing, you have a leak. Once you finish the experiment, flush a few times so you don't stain the toilet.

Faucets:

- Take a watch or clock with a second hand and time how often your faucet drips. A leaky faucet that drips at the rate of one drip per second can waste more than 3,000 gallons in a year!
- There are parts that hold your faucet together called washers and gaskets—they can wear down and cause drips. If someone in your house is handy, these parts usually can be replaced easily.
- There's also a little screen device called an "aerator" that can be screwed onto the tip of your faucet—it adds air into the water stream so you can use less water to wash your hands or brush your teeth without noticing a difference in water flow. Ask your parents to look for the WaterSense label when buying an aerator or replacing a faucet—that means the product will work well and save water.



Showers:

- Showerheads—the place where water comes out in streams at the top of your shower—can also get old and leak, even when the water is not on. A showerhead that drops just 10 drips in a minute wastes more than 500 gallons per year. That's enough water, if you saved it all up, to wash 60 loads of dishes in your dishwasher!
- Most leaky showerheads can be fixed by making sure they're screwed in tight. Having someone handy wrap the showerhead in "pipe tape," a special tape available at hardware stores, and using a wrench to tighten it will help.

Toilets:

- It's one of the oldest prank phone calls—"Is your toilet running? Then you'd better catch it!" But a running toilet is no joke. If you can hear the water in your toilet making noise, even when no one flushed recently, you have a running toilet that could be wasting 200 gallons of water or more every day! Sometimes you just need to jiggle the handle to fix it, but sometimes a part needs to be replaced.

- Many toilets leaks are caused because the "flapper" is decayed or broken. The flapper is a rubber piece that opens up to let the water flow from the tank into the bowl when you pull down on the toilet handle. If someone in your house is handy, they can easily replace this inexpensive part of your toilet.
- If the problem is not just an old flapper and your family has to replace a leaky toilet, tell your parents to look for one with the WaterSense label to save both water and money on your family's water and sewer bill.

Outdoors:

- Check your garden hose for leaks where it connects to the side of the house. If it leaks when the hose is turned on, make sure the hose is screwed in tight. If that doesn't work, someone handy may need to replace the nylon or rubber hose washer or wrap the "spigot," which is the metal faucet where the end of the hose attaches to the wall, in pipe tape.
- If your family has a sprinkler system that waters your lawn, remind your parents to check the system each spring before turning it on to make sure the sprinklers were not broken during the winter or have sprung any leaks.

For more information, visit www.epa.gov/watersense/fixaleak.