

Contact: Ginny Long
Director of Public Affairs
Moen Incorporated
(800) 321-8809, Ext. 2019

March, 2002

Jennifer Allanson
Robert Falls & Co. Public Relations
(216) 696-0229

PLUMBING 101:

Quick Tips To Keep Your Plumbing In Top Shape

North Olmsted, Ohio – Although you may not feel qualified to take on major plumbing installations or repairs around the house, there are many *small* things that you can easily do to repair, clean or maintain your plumbing. How do you clear a clogged drain? What do you do to keep a faucet looking and running like new? How do you prepare for a plumbing emergency? What is the best way to clean fixtures? Read on for the answers to those questions plus other tips for keeping your plumbing in top shape!

Be Prepared for a Plumbing Emergency

Homeowners hope that they will never have to face a plumbing emergency, but the best time to prepare is *before* it happens.

“When water is spewing from a broken pipe or creeping slowly towards your carpet is not the time to be hunting for a water shut-off valve,” said Mike Pickett, Vice President, Product Development at Moen Incorporated. “Our plumbing experts first recommend making a plumbing discovery tour of your home. A few minutes of your time now can provide the assurance you need to handle a crisis down the road.”

- *Make a Plumbing Discovery Tour*

A “plumbing discovery tour” involves locating and clearly marking all of the shut-off valves in your home. First, find the main water shut-off valve. This valve is usually

located in the basement on the pipe coming through the wall on the street side of your house (near the water meter). By shutting off this valve, you will shut off water to your entire house, which may be necessary for a serious emergency.

Be aware, though, that if you do shut off the water at the main valve, a gas hot water tank must be turned down to as low possible (if you look at the control on the face of the tank, set it to the “vacation” setting). An electric tank should be shut off at the electrical panel. If you have a hot water heating system, you will also need to check that the furnace has a sufficient supply of water so it does not boil itself dry.

During your tour, you should also note the locations of shut-off valves for other plumbing fixtures. Below your kitchen sink you will most likely find shut-off valves for both hot and cold water. In the bathroom, there are three primary valves operating the faucet, toilet and bathtub/shower. These valves are typically located below the fixtures for easy access, though the tub valve(s) may be located in the basement (or behind the bathroom wall in a bedroom closet, for example).

Continue the tour in every room that has a plumbing related appliance. Be sure to locate, test and tag valves to your washing machine, dishwasher, hot water heating system, water heater, refrigerator ice maker, water softener – every place in the house where water is used.

- *Check The Condition of Your Valves*

It is important to check all valves often as they may become “frozen” from lack of use. A wrench or some “WD-40” carefully applied will probably free up any stuck valves.

Leaks, Clogs and Other Problems

For more serious matters it is usually best to call a plumber, but there are some things you can do yourself to take care of small problems.

- *Clogged Drain*

To clear a clogged drain, first try a plunger. If that does not remove the problem, use a hand auger, which is a flexible steel cable that can be pushed into the drain to break up the obstruction. Your next step of defense is to use a blow bag that hooks to a garden hose and uses water pressure to clear the clog. Only use caustic, acid-based chemical drain cleaners as a last resort as they may damage pipes.

- *Continuously Running Toilet*

If water continuously runs in your toilet, it may be a problem with the float rising too high, causing water to trickle down the overflow tube. To fix this, bend the rod slightly downward so that the float ball is lowered. If fixing that doesn't help, see if the trip lever chain is tangled or has fallen off. Next check the tank flapper at the base of the tank and the ballcock, which is located near the top of the tank, these items may have to be cleaned, adjusted or replaced if they have worn out.

- *Toilet Won't Flush*

If a toilet won't flush, it is likely that the chain has slipped off or a new flush-handle assembly is needed. Start by examining the inside of the tank – is one end of the chain attached to the flush handle and the other to a rubber seal at the bottom? If the chain has slipped off, reattach it. If the handle itself is broken, you will need to replace it with a new assembly.

- *Leaky Faucet*

If you have a cartridge-type faucet, a leak will usually indicate that the O-rings need to be replaced. This is a simple repair that even the novice DIYer can perform. If the faucet leaks from the handle, the upper O-ring probably needs replacement while a drip from the spout will indicate a problem with the O-ring at the base of the spout assembly. O-rings can also be found forming a seal between the hot and cold supply lines – so be sure to examine these once you have the faucet disassembled. When replacing O-rings, give them a light coating of heatproof lubricant. If replacing O-rings doesn't solve your problems, you may need to replace the cartridge itself.

A ceramic disk faucet that leaks at the base of the handle means that one or more of the inlet seals on the cartridge may need replacing. These seals can be easily replaced. You may also want to clean the inlet ports on this type of faucet as they can become clogged with mineral deposits. A complete cartridge replacement may be needed if leaking problems persist.

A difficult faucet to repair is a rotating ball faucet, because of its many parts. You should first disassemble the cam, ball and spout to see if there are any problems there – many leaks result from a worn out ball or gasket. If those seem fine, remove seals and springs to check for blockages. Leaks can also spring up from around the handle or from under the base of the spout. Handle leaks indicate that the adjusting ring has loosened or the seal above the ball is worn. Leaks from under the spout result from O-ring failure. Examine all O-rings encircling the body of the faucet to see if they look worn.

- *Hard to Move Faucet Handles*

If you are having trouble turning your faucet on and off, you most likely have a problem with mineral deposits. To solve this problem, simply clean the cartridge and apply a thin film of FSA-approved silicon grease – never use petroleum jelly.

Basic Maintenance of Plumbing Fixtures

- *Faucets*

One of the easiest plumbing fixtures to care for is a faucet – the only things needed for cleaning are some water and a little elbow grease.

“Many people think that you need to use a commercial cleansing product to clean a faucet, but the best thing is a soft, damp cloth and warm water,” says Pickett. “To keep your faucet looking beautiful for years to come, you will want to stay away from abrasives and harsh cleaning materials. Occasionally applying a high-quality wax polish will further ensure the beauty of your faucet.”

If water pressure seems to be getting low or the flow pattern is inconsistent it is recommended that you clean the aerator (the round attachment at the end of the spout). This can be done by unscrewing the part, then using a toothbrush dipped in vinegar to remove dirt or trapped particles.

- *Composite Sinks*

For minor stains on a composite sink, use warm water and mild dish soap. For more serious stains, homeowners are advised to use a cleanser with bleach, though this type of product should not be used on a daily basis.

Hard water stains are best treated with white vinegar followed by a thorough rinsing, while yellowing due to calcium and lime deposits require a de-liming solution. Polish your sink only with those products suitable for acrylic surfaces – never use abrasive cleansers or even abrasive scrub pads.

- *Stainless Steel Sinks*

If maintained properly, quality stainless steel sinks will not chip, peel, rust or discolor. For routine cleaning, use soap, ammonia or detergents with a soft sponge or cloth. Hard water spots can be removed with white water vinegar, while persistent spots and stains may require a stainless steel cleaner or household cleanser. Never use steel wool pads for cleaning these sinks.

It is interesting to note that homeowners should not use rubber mats with stainless steel sinks since residual water deposits and food particles trapped underneath these mats can cause sink discoloration. In addition, wet sponges, cloths and cleaning pads should not be left on the sink's surface. Many liquid hand soaps contain chemical additives, which will affect the original shine of the finish if left to dry in your sink.

- *Showers*

To clean a showerhead that seems to have lower water pressure, unscrew the swivel ball nut using a wrench (put electrical or duct tape on the flange to protect the fixture). Unscrew the collar nut from the showerhead and then clean the outlet and inlet holes

with a thin wire. Anti-lime and calcium cleaners can also be used – simply dip your showerhead in these products for easy cleaning.

Like faucets, shower fixture exteriors should be cleaned with warm water and a soft cloth to remove water spots.

- *Drains*

Regular maintenance of drains will help reduce the risk of clogging. Flush drains bi-weekly with hot tap water, especially those drains that are not used often such as in a guest bathroom. Once every six months, use a non-caustic drain cleaner on all household drains.

To prevent lint from building up and eventually clogging drainpipes near the washing machine, put an old nylon stocking over the end of the rubber drain hose. This will trap all of the lint from your washing machine water before it reaches your drain, and should be changed as necessary.

Pipe Maintenance

There are a couple tricks of the trade that you can use in your home for pipes.

- *Prevent Pipes from Freezing*

The best thing you can do to prevent frozen pipes is to insulate them. Pipe jackets in standard lengths can be purchased at a local home center. For a less expensive alternative, you can cut regular insulation into strips and bundle it around pipes. If you use fiberglass insulation, however, be sure to wear gloves,

long sleeves and long pants, to avoid contact with the irritating particles that come off of this kind of insulation. These techniques will also quiet noisy pipes to stop them from banging against wall studs or joists in your home.

- *Thawing a Frozen Pipe*

If you do have a frozen pipe, you will need to thaw it using a heat gun or hair dryer. However, make sure to keep these items on a low setting so that the pipe doesn't overheat.

Find a 24-Hour Plumbing Contractor...Now

And finally, all homeowners know that if anything is to go wrong in your home, it will pick the most inconvenient time to do so – usually in the middle of the night or during a holiday. For that reason, it is important to have at your reach the name of a reliable plumbing contractor offering 24-hour service for major emergencies. Although you can find names of plumbers in your local telephone directory, it may be better to ask for recommendations from friends or neighbors. A phone call (ahead of time) to ensure that the plumber is still in business and can provide 24-hour service is a good idea, and you may also check if a pager number is available for after-hour calls.

For more information about plumbing needs, contact Moen Incorporated, 25300 Al Moen Drive, North Olmsted, Ohio 44070, call 1-800-553-6636, or visit the web site at www.moen.com.

###

EDITORS NOTE: Moen Incorporated is one of the world's largest producers of residential and commercial plumbing products. Moen is the #1 brand of faucets in North America. The company manufactures a complete line of single and two-handle faucets in a wide assortment of styles and finishes. It is also a leading producer of residential and commercial sinks, a variety of shower accessories, and bathroom accessories (sold under the brands Moen, Cleveland Faucet Group, and Creative Specialties International).

Moen Incorporated is an operating company of Fortune Brands, Inc. (NYSE: FO, www.fortunebrands.com), the consumer products company.