

# Hot Water Heater Maintenance

Consider the fact that SBMWD's water, as is the case with most of the water delivered throughout Southern California, has a high mineral content. Therefore homeowners should remember that periodic inspection and maintenance of their hot water heaters is important to keeping the units operating at top efficiency. Therefore, partial draining and annual flushing of the tank will help prevent the buildup of scale and help extend the life of the tank. Draining the tank is a fairly simple procedure that a competent do-it-yourselfer should be able to handle. *However, if you are at all unsure, you may want to consider having an experienced plumber assist you with this project.*

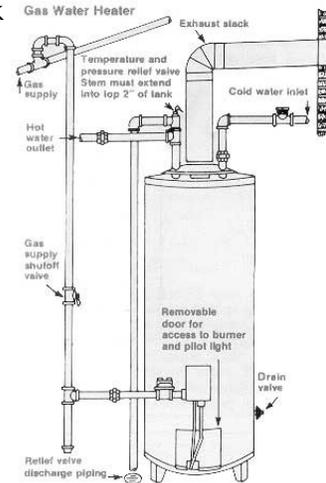
## [Hot Water Heater Tips](#) [How to Flush Your Water Heater](#)

### Hot Water Heater Tips

- Check the temperature and pressure relief valve on your hot water heater annually to be sure the valve is functioning. Consult the operating manual for the procedure. If the valve does not work, have it replaced.

*Important Safety Note: Hot water will drain from the line connected to the relief valve when you open it. Have a bucket handy to catch the water. According to the Uniform Plumbing Code, a pipe should be connected to the pressure relief valve, extending down along the side of the tank to within 6 inches of the floor. This extension pipe prevents the spraying of hot water when the valve is released or if a malfunction occurs.*

- Every six months, open the drain valve near the hot water heater tank bottom and drain 1 or 2 gallons of water from the hot water heater into a bucket or through a garden hose to remove any sediment that may have accumulated in the tank bottom  
*Note: If this procedure is not done regularly, residual sediment particles may prevent the drain valve from reseating properly upon closing and the valve washer may have to be replaced.*
- Inspect the exhaust stack on gas fired hot water heaters to ensure that all pipe connections are secure and free of rust, corrosion, and obstructions (annually). (Note: It is essential that fuel fired hot water heaters vent their gasses to the outside; escape of gasses inside the home could be lethal & pose a fire hazard.)
- If you have installed an insulation blanket around the tank of your hot water heater, about every three months you should check to ensure that the insulation stays in the proper position, noting particularly that it is not blocking the combustion air inlet or the exhaust vent of gas fired units.



- Check the temperature setting on the hot water heater. If it is above 120°F or 140°F, or if your dishwasher does not have its own heating element, you are wasting energy and increasing the risk of you or a family member being scalded by hot water.
- Check the temperature gauge on the boiler of your tankless water heater system every six months. Consult the operating instructions to determine the correct temperature setting.

## How to Flush Your Water Heater

Water heater manufacturers recommend flushing periodically. How often depends upon the quality of the water served to your home or business. Areas with high mineral content, such as we all have here in SBMWD and most of Southern California, should be flushed more often.

Over time, your heater can accumulate sediment consisting of a collection of very fine sand and various mineral deposits. The resulting buildup of sediment can harden, resulting in a variety of interesting noises coming from your tank, reduction of the efficiency of your unit and sometimes even clogging the drain valve.

1. Turn off the heater! If your unit is gas, set the gas valve to "Pilot" to prevent the burners from coming on while you are flushing it. If your heater is electric be sure to turn off the circuit breakers. *If the water level drops below the heating elements and the thermostat turns the elements on, the heating elements will probably burn out quite rapidly.*
2. Connect a garden hose to the drain valve at the bottom of the tank. Make sure the outlet of the hose is in a safe area away from pets and children. It can be very hot can scald quickly
3. Close the shut off valve on the cold inlet to the unit.
4. Carefully open the temperature/pressure relief valve at the top of the tank by lifting the lever. *Leave the valve open.*
5. Open the drain valve at the bottom of the heater allowing the water to flow out through the garden hose.
  - a. If the sediment is clogging the drain valve then try closing the temperature/pressure relief valve and turn the cold inlet valve back on to "power flush" the sediment out.
  - b. In instances where sediment may have hardened into chunks that can block the drain valve, you may have run the hot water out of the tank by opening a hot water faucet and let the water flow until it is cool. Then you can remove the garden hose and use a long screwdriver to break up the clog. *This is likely to be a very messy procedure.*
6. When the garden hose runs clear you are finished.
7. Close the drain valve at the bottom of the tank and remove the garden hose.

8. Close the pressure relief valve at the top of the tank and turn the cold inlet valve back on.
9. Open a hot faucet in your house, and let it run until no air comes out.
10. Turn the heater back on.