TIPS FOR MAINTAINING YOUR PRIVATE PLUMBING

The Water Resources Department provides drinking water to its water customers that meets or exceeds all federal, state, and local regulations including National Drinking Water Standards. At times, customers may experience individual concerns with the water coming from their private plumbing.

Operation manuals should be consulted for proper operation and troubleshooting instructions; many manufacturers provide these manuals on their websites. Customers are encouraged to call a professional, licensed contractor for help with complex jobs or those beyond the knowledge and abilities of the homeowner.

Here are a few suggestions for maintaining your private plumbing system.

Flushing Household Pipes
Organic material that collects in your plumbing may contribute to odor and taste changes and can be eliminated by flushing your water pipes. All seasonal residents and employees of seasonally-opened schools and businesses are encouraged to flush private plumbing prior to drinking the water. Water sitting in pipes for prolonged periods may become unsafe for human consumption.

Consider these tips:
- When flushing household plumbing, use only COLD water. Hot water is used when flushing hot water heaters.
- Flush in a sequential manner (from the largest to smallest pipe). Flush the cold water in the bathtub faucet first, then work through all other faucets in the house. Toilets should be the last item flushed since toilets typically have the smallest plumbing supply lines.
- Remove shower heads and the aerators from the ends of indoor faucets and run shower and faucets wide-open for 3 to 5 minutes. Removing the aerators before flushing will help prevent anything dislodged from accumulating on the screens.
- Flush the toilets 2 or 3 times while faucets are running. This generates a large flow of water through pipes to help dislodge any build-up of organic material that may be causing the taste and odor change.
- After 3 to 5 minutes of flushing, turn off the water faucets. Clean the aerators before reinstalling.

Disinfecting a Drain
An odor of rotten eggs (or a sewage smell) is usually caused by gases forming in household drains. These gases are formed by bacteria which live on food, soap, hair, and other organic matter that accumulate in the drain. Since these gases are heavier than air, they remain in the drain until the water is turned on. As the water runs down the drain, gases are pushed up the drain into the air around the sink. It’s not surprising this odor is often mistakenly associated with water because it’s noticed only when the water is turned on. To eliminate this problem, the bacteria in the drain must be reduced.

CAUTION: Do not mix any drain cleaners or detergents with bleach; certain combinations can create toxic fumes and may be combustible. Always follow label instructions.

Use the following steps to help solve the situation:
- Run the cold water about 15 seconds into the drain to be disinfected. Turn the water off.
- Pour approximately 1 to 2 cups of liquid laundry bleach down the drain. Pour the bleach slowly around the edges so that it runs down the sides of the drain pipe. CAUTION: Bleach may cause eye damage, skin irritation, and may damage clothing. Take proper precautions and always follow label instructions.
- If the odor comes from a sink with a garbage disposal, turn on the disposal for a few seconds while the bleach is being poured to help disperse the bleach around the inside of the disposal. CAUTION: Bleach may cause eye damage, skin irritation, and may damage clothing. Take special care to avoid splashing, especially while the disposal is running.
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- Allow the bleach to remain undisturbed in the drain for 10 minutes. Set a timer as a reminder. **CAUTION:** Prolonged bleach contact with metals may cause pitting and/or discoloration.

- After 10 minutes, run the hot water into the drain for 1-2 minutes to flush out the bleach. If the garbage disposal has been disinfected, thoroughly flush it.

- Repeat this procedure if the odor returns.

**Flushing a Water Heater**

Water heaters should be flushed at least once a year to control the build-up of mineral deposits naturally present in water. This may help with more efficient operation and may extend the life of the water heater. Also, flushing is advised if the hot water appears yellow or brownish in color (indicating an accumulation of rust) or if sand-like mineral sediments are visible. If you do not feel comfortable performing these maintenance procedures yourself, please consult a licensed professional plumber.

- Do not shut off the gas or the water supply to the heater.

- Attach a garden hose to the draincock located at the bottom of the heater. The draincock usually looks like a regular hose bib (outdoor faucet) or a round dial with a threaded hole in the middle.

- Extend the garden hose to a place where the water can safely exit the heater (e.g. a drain, driveway, etc.)

- Open the draincock to allow the water to exit the heater. **CAUTION:** Water may be hot and under normal household water pressure. **PLEASE NOTE:** If the draincock is made of plastic and the heater is several years old, it may be difficult to open and may break easily if forced.

- After 5 minutes, fill a bucket with the still-flushing water.

- Allow the water to stand undisturbed for a minute and see if the water is clear or if any sand-like particles settle to the bottom. If the water is clear and no particles are observed, proceed to the next step. If the water is discolored or particles are observed, repeat the previous two steps until the flushed water is completely clear and free of sediment.

- Close the draincock and remove the garden hose.

**Utility Easements**

The property owner and/or customer should know the location of manholes as well as the water supply and wastewater service lines on the property. Keep easements clear so that crews have access to these locations. Do not place permanent structures over water and wastewater service lines. Fences, sheds, paved surfaces, plants and other obstructions will be removed, if necessary, to complete a repair.

**Saving Water Inside Your Home**

Conservation of water in the home not only saves water, it also saves the energy used to process and distribute the water. In your home, less water will need to be heated. Customers may see savings in their water and/or energy bills.

- Never use the toilet as a wastebasket. Some older model toilets use 7 gallons of water each time they are flushed!

- Check toilets for leaks at least twice a year using a simple dye test. A leaky toilet, usually caused by a warped or poorly fitting flapper, can waste up to 200 gallons of water each day. Check for leaks by placing a leak detection dye tablet or ten drops of food coloring in the toilet tank. After a few minutes, if you see color in the toilet bowl, you have a leak.

- Fix those leaky faucets! Even a small leak the size of a pinhead could waste up to 7 gallons each day.

Please note that these tips are provided to assist with private plumbing maintenance. A licensed professional plumber should be contacted if you feel uncomfortable performing these maintenance procedures yourself. The City of St. Petersburg and the persons involved in the creation or delivery of this information shall not be liable for any direct, indirect, consequential, or incidental damages (including property damage, damages for loss of business profits, business interruption, etc.) arising out of the use of this information, or any omission or inaccuracy of any information.