

Hot water heater (for Jan 2005)

The hot water heaters in our homes usually have a six year warranty. That has nothing to do with how long it will actually last, only how long the manufacturer claims they will replace it if it leaks or a part breaks. To have your heater last as long as possible, drain off the sediment at the bottom of the tank at least once a year. Built up sediment can cause areas of the glass lined tank to overheat and crack. The drain valve at the bottom of the tank is plastic so treat it tenderly and do not use pliers to turn it. Drain into a pan or bucket that fits easily under the valve. Remember, the water is HOT! Just drain a little off until the water is clear. This requires bending over so be careful!

The insulation on modern heaters is usually adequate but if you want to put an extra insulating blanket on, be sure you do not block the area at the bottom where the gas burner is or the area at the top where the exhaust draft is. These areas require a supply of air. When you wrap your heater you also cover the pilot flame lighting and safety instructions (reading glasses required). The instructions are important especially if the wind blows out your pilot light. Not common but it does happen. Keep the seam of the blanket if you use one, over this area so if you need the instructions it will be easy to find. Do not store anything on top of the heater, the flue pipe gets VERY hot.

There is a drain pan under the heater in case of a leak. The pan will drain any water off to the garage so it doesn't run through your house and carpeting. Some homes have the hot water heater in the garage. At the side (near the top) of the heater is a temperature/pressure relief valve. This valve will open if it senses the water is getting too hot or the pressure inside the tank is getting too high. It will then open to prevent a tank rupture. If it does open, it dumps into the same drain pipe that terminates in the garage.

Above the heater is a valve that shuts off the cold water supply to the heater. Locate and tag it so if you have a problem you will be able to shut it off quickly.

There is also a gas shut-off located near the burner opening that you should be familiar with. This valve will close quickly with a 90 degree turn.

The thermostat valve keeps the water at the temperature setting selected on the face dial. Too high a setting can cause burns so be careful. A setting just above the "warm" line on the dial works for me. There is also a vacation setting.

The knob on top of the thermostat valve has OFF, PILOT and ON positions. If the pilot light goes out a heat sensor will signal the thermostat valve to shut off the gas, even to the pilot light. The pilot light will have to be lit manually if this happens. Prepare to be on the floor for awhile with matches and a holder or long nose pliers to keep the match near the pilot light jet while you push down on the knob in the PILOT position. Once lit, continue holding for at least one minute to heat the sensor or you will have to do it all over again. When the pilot stays lit after releasing, move the knob to the ON position.

Some people notice the sink water is hotter than the shower/tub water. The shower valves are regulated and there are two ways of doing this. There is a stop screw behind the bezel for the single handle lever that prevents the hot side from being fully opened. This is to prevent the water from being too hot and possibly burning your skin. If you feel it is set too low you can back the Allen screw off a little at a time until you are satisfied. There are also small hot and cold regulating valves behind the bezel in the wall that can be opened or closed with a screw driver to allow more or less flow. They usually need no adjustment.

A complaint heard often (from my wife) is how long you have to run the hot water before it gets hot. Our lines are (in slab houses) under the ground and a distance from the hot water heater. There are hot water circulating pumps available that allow a little water to re-circulate keeping the water in the line hot so it is warm as soon as you turn it on. The pump has a clock timer so it runs only when you think you need it the most. Some use a thermostat to turn it on and off. I have one and if I shower at an odd time when the pump is not running I really miss it. Same at the kitchen sink; if the pump is not running it seems forever to get hot water.

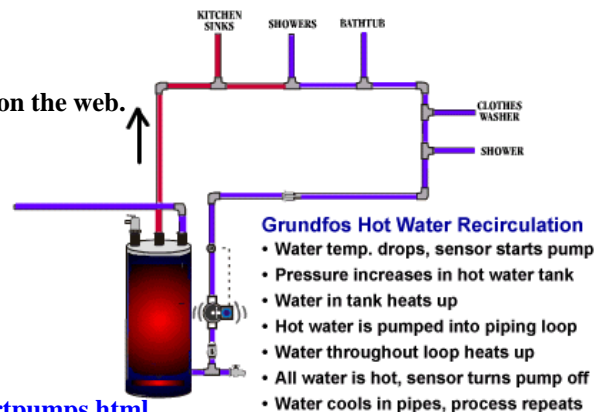
To investigate or purchase, check out these sites on the web.

Figure about \$275 for material.

<http://rewci.com/whhohotwaci.html>

<http://www.circulatorpumps.com/>

<http://www.plumbingworld.com/grundfoscomfortpumps.html>



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