

Vacation Plumbing Preparation Checklist



A Comprehensive Guide for Homeowners

Quick Overview

Leaving home for a few days or several weeks can increase the risk of hidden plumbing problems turning into expensive disasters. A small leak, clogged drain, or failed water supply line can cause significant damage when no one is there to catch it.

This checklist helps homeowners prepare their plumbing system before traveling by reducing the risk of leaks, water damage, sewer odors, frozen pipes, and appliance failures.

Before You Start

- Determine how long you will be away. Longer trips may require shutting off more plumbing systems.
- Decide whether someone will check on your home during your absence.
- Locate your home's main water shut-off valve and verify that it operates properly.
- Identify shut-off valves for toilets, sinks, washing machines, dishwashers, and ice makers.
- Review any smart home monitoring devices or leak detection systems you already have.
- Make sure you know how to restart appliances such as water heaters if they are turned off.
- Gather emergency contact information for a trusted neighbor, family member, or plumber.
- Check local weather forecasts if traveling during freezing temperatures.

Tools, Supplies, or Resources Needed

- Flashlight
- Adjustable wrench
- Garden hose (for draining a water heater if needed)
- Towels or rags
- Bucket

- Leak detection sensors (optional)
- Smart water shut-off system (optional)
- Water heater owner's manual
- Contact information for a licensed plumber
- Phone or tablet for monitoring smart home devices

Step-by-Step Checklist

■ Inspect all visible plumbing fixtures for leaks before leaving.

Look under sinks, around toilets, and behind appliances for moisture or drips.

■ Check faucets and showerheads for slow drips.

Even a small leak can waste water and become worse while you are away.

■ Inspect exposed pipes for corrosion, cracks, or signs of wear.

Address any problems before traveling.

■ Examine washing machine hoses.

Replace old rubber hoses that show cracking or bulging.

■ Check dishwasher and refrigerator water supply lines.

Look for kinks, leaks, or loose fittings.

■ Test toilets for leaks.

Listen for running water and ensure the tanks stop filling properly.

■ Empty and clean the garbage disposal.

Run cold water while operating the disposal to remove food debris and reduce odors.

■ Avoid leaving dirty dishes or food waste in sinks.

This helps prevent unpleasant smells and pest problems.

■ Run water in seldom-used drains.

This fills drain traps and helps block sewer gases.

■ Pour a small amount of water into floor drains.

Basement, utility room, and garage drains should have water in the trap.

■ Consider adding a small amount of mineral oil to infrequently used drains.

This can slow evaporation during extended trips.

■ Shut off the water supply to washing machines and ice makers if possible.

These appliances are common sources of water damage.

- Turn off the main water supply if the home will be vacant for an extended period.

This greatly reduces the risk of a major plumbing leak.

- Drain the plumbing system if you will be gone for a very long time or if freezing conditions are expected.

Consult a professional if you are unfamiliar with this process.

- Set the water heater to vacation mode if available.

This saves energy while maintaining safe operation.

- Turn off the water heater completely if recommended by the manufacturer and if the water supply will be shut off.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions.

- Protect exposed pipes from freezing if cold weather is expected.

Insulate vulnerable pipes and maintain adequate indoor temperatures.

- Set your thermostat to a safe temperature.

Many experts recommend keeping the home at least 55°F during freezing weather.

- Test leak detection devices and replace batteries if necessary.

Ensure notifications are working properly.

- Verify that your smart water shut-off system is connected and functioning.

Test remote access before leaving.

- Ask a trusted person to inspect the home during long trips.

Provide instructions on what to do if a leak is discovered.

- Leave emergency contact numbers where they can be easily found.

Include your plumber, utility company, and a trusted neighbor.

- Double-check that all outdoor faucets and hoses are secure.

Disconnect hoses if freezing weather is possible.

- Confirm that sprinkler systems and irrigation controls are operating as intended.

Repair leaks or disable unnecessary watering schedules.

- Perform one final walk-through of the house before leaving.

Look for anything that may have been missed.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Forgetting to locate the main water shut-off valve before an emergency.

- Leaving washing machine hoses under constant pressure.
- Ignoring small leaks because they seem minor.
- Turning off the water heater without following manufacturer recommendations.
- Allowing drain traps to dry out during long vacations.
- Leaving hoses connected during freezing weather.
- Assuming smart leak detectors do not require testing.
- Failing to have someone check the property during extended trips.

Safety, Quality, or Success Tips

- A whole-house water shut-off is one of the best protections against major water damage.
- Leak detection sensors can provide early warning before a small issue becomes a disaster.
- Photograph your plumbing shut-off locations for quick reference.
- Keep important plumbing records and warranty information in one place.
- If you are unsure how to shut down any plumbing component, consult a licensed plumber before your trip.

Final Review Checklist

- All visible plumbing leaks have been checked.
- Faucets and toilets are operating properly.
- Appliance water supply lines have been inspected.
- Garbage disposal and sinks have been cleaned.
- Drain traps have been filled with water.
- Washing machine and appliance shut-off valves have been considered or closed.
- The main water supply has been shut off if appropriate.
- The water heater has been adjusted for vacation use.
- Freeze protection measures have been completed if needed.
- Leak detection devices have been tested.
- Emergency contacts have been updated.
- A trusted person has been asked to check the home if necessary.

■ A final plumbing walk-through has been completed.

When to Get Help

Contact a licensed plumber if:

- You cannot locate or operate the main water shut-off valve.
- You discover active leaks or water damage.
- Your water heater requires special shutdown procedures.
- Pipes need to be drained for extended absences.
- You have recurring plumbing problems that have not been repaired.
- You plan to leave a seasonal or vacation property vacant for months.
- You want to install a smart leak detection or automatic water shut-off system.
- You are uncertain about freeze protection or winterization procedures.

A professional inspection before a long trip can provide peace of mind and may help prevent costly emergency repairs while you are away.