DrainResponsePros

2026 EDITION



THE HOMEOWNER'S FIELD GUIDE

What's wrong with my plumbing?

Match the symptom to the problem: clogs, sewer backups, burst pipes, water heaters, toilets and leaks. What to do now and when to call.

- Clogged drain
- Main sewer line backup
- Burst or frozen pipe
- Water heater trouble
- Toilet problem
- Leak under a sink or in a wall

CALL A LOCAL PRO

(833) 835-1569

drainresponsepros.com

WELCOME

Keep this guide where you can find it fast

Problems at home rarely wait for a good moment. This guide helps you recognize what's going on, decide how fast to act and know what to do in the first few minutes.

1. **Start with the sign.** The "Identify it by the symptom" page matches what you see to the likely problem.
2. **Check the urgency.** Every problem carries a color: ● Call today, ● Call this week, ● Not urgent.
3. **Do the first steps.** Each problem lists what to do right now, while you call.

⚠ **Safety first.** General guidance only. For a gas smell, flooding near electricity or anyone hurt, leave and call 911.

ONE CALL CONNECTS YOU WITH AN INDEPENDENT LOCAL COMPANY
(833) 835-1569

INSIDE

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AT A GLANCE

How urgent is it?

A quick way to sort the problem in front of you.

Call today

- Main sewer line backup
- Burst or frozen pipe
- Gas smell

Call this week

- Clogged drain
- Water heater trouble
- Leak under a sink or in a wall
- Weak pressure or water line problem

Not urgent

- Toilet problem

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START HERE

Identify it by the symptom

Plumbing problems usually announce themselves. Find your symptom, then jump to the likely cause.

WHAT YOU NOTICE	MOST LIKELY	PAGE
One sink drains slowly	**Clogged drain**	6
Several drains back up at once	**Main sewer line**	8
Gurgling when the toilet flushes	**Main sewer line**	8
Water spraying from a pipe	**Burst pipe**	10
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01 CALL THIS WEEK

PROBLEM 1 OF 8

Clogged drain

USUAL CAUSES
Grease, hair, soap, food

SCOPE
Usually one fixture

How to recognize it

Water drains slowly or stands in one sink, tub or shower while other drains work fine.

Prevent it next time

- Use strainers in sinks, tubs and showers.
- Wipe grease into the trash, not the sink.
- Run hot water after using the disposal.

When it's more

If several drains slow down at once, the problem is likely further down the line. See main sewer line.

Signs to look for

- One sink or tub drains slowly
- Standing water after use
- Bad smell from one drain
- A plunger helps only briefly

Do this now

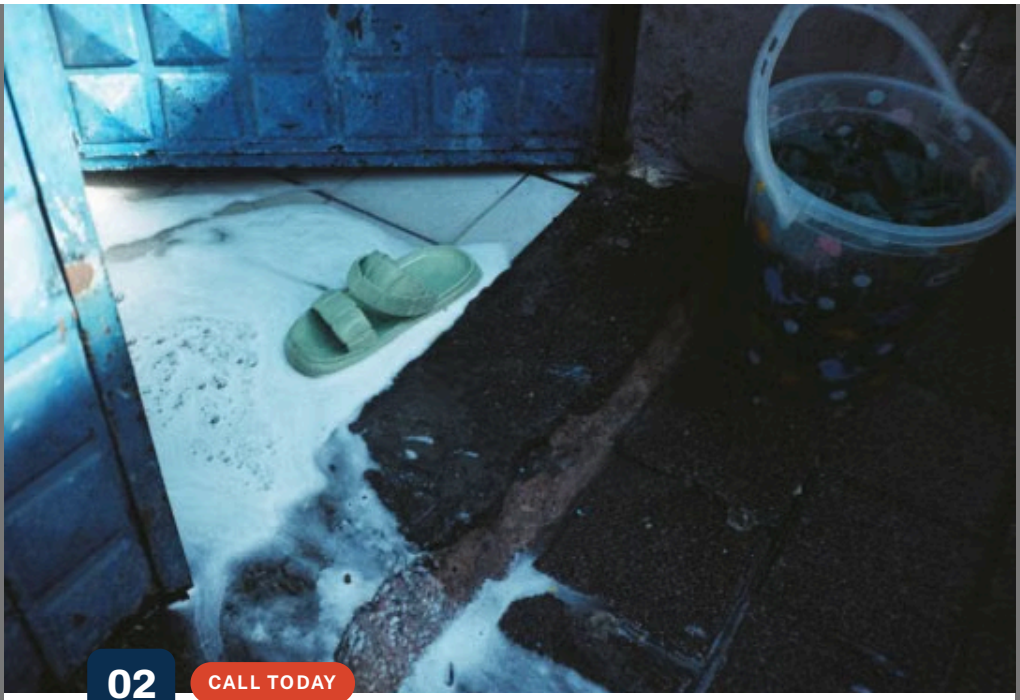
1. Stop using that fixture.
2. Skip chemical drain openers; they can damage pipes.
3. Try a plunger on sinks and tubs.

What the pro will do

1. Asks which fixtures are slow and since when.
2. Clears the line with a cable or water jetting.
3. May run a camera to check for damage or roots.

> Call this week, today if water is backing up.

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02 CALL TODAY

PROBLEM 2 OF 8

Main sewer line backup

CLUE	FIRST TO BACK UP
Several drains at once	**Floor drain or tub**

How to recognize it

Toilets, tubs and floor drains back up together. Running the washer makes a tub or floor drain bubble or overflow.

Prevent it next time

- Flush only toilet paper. No wipes, even 'flushable' ones.
- Keep grease out of every drain.
- Know where your cleanout cap is.

Why it matters

Everything in the house drains through one line. A blockage sends sewage back into the home.

Signs to look for

- Multiple drains slow or backed up
- Gurgling toilets
- Water in a floor drain or tub when the washer runs
- Sewage smell

Do this now

1. Stop using all water in the house.
2. Keep everyone away from sewage water.
3. Note which drains backed up first.

What the pro will do

1. Opens the main cleanout to relieve the backup.
2. Clears the main line and often inspects it by camera.
3. Explains repair options if roots or a break are found.

> Call today. Sewage backups get worse with every flush.

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03 CALL TODAY

PROBLEM 3 OF 8

Burst or frozen pipe

COMMON AFTER	LOSES
A hard freeze	Gallons a minute

How to recognize it

Water spraying or pouring from a pipe, a sudden pressure drop, or no water at all from taps during a freeze.

Prevent it next time

- Insulate pipes in garages, crawl spaces and outside walls.
- In a hard freeze, open cabinet doors and let taps drip.
- Disconnect garden hoses before winter.

Why it matters

A broken supply pipe runs until you shut the main valve, and frozen pipes can split as they thaw.

Signs to look for

- Water spraying or dripping from a pipe
- No water from taps in freezing weather
- Frost on exposed pipes
- Bulging or cracked pipe

Do this now

1. Shut off the main water valve.
2. Turn off power to wet areas from a dry spot.
3. Open a faucet to relieve pressure.

What the pro will do

1. Finds the break and replaces the damaged section.
2. Checks nearby pipes for more freeze damage.
3. Turns water back on and tests for leaks.

> Call today.

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04 CALL THIS WEEK

PROBLEM 4 OF 8

Water heater trouble

TYPICAL LIFE	BAD SIGN
8 to 12 years for a tank	**Water from the tank**

How to recognize it

No hot water, water that runs out fast, rusty water, rumbling noises or a puddle at the base.

Prevent it next time

- Flush the tank once a year to clear sediment.
- Check the relief valve and the area around the tank.
- Note the install year on the label.

How urgent

No hot water is a this-week problem. A leaking tank is a today problem.

Signs to look for

- No or little hot water
- Rust-colored hot water
- Popping or rumbling
- Water at the base of the tank

Do this now

1. If leaking, shut the cold supply to the tank.
2. Turn off power or set gas to off.
3. Check the breaker or pilot light.

What the pro will do

1. Checks the power, pilot or ignitor, thermostat and elements.
2. Tests the relief valve and looks for tank leaks.
3. Explains repair or replacement, based on age and condition.

> Call this week; today if the tank is leaking.

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05 NOT URGENT

PROBLEM 5 OF 8

Toilet problem

RUNNING TOILET
Can waste many gallons a day

ROCKING TOILET
Seal may be leaking

How to recognize it

Constant running, frequent clogs, water around the base or a toilet that rocks.

Prevent it next time

- Replace a worn flapper as soon as it starts running.
- Don't flush wipes, paper towels or cotton.
- Tighten loose toilet bolts before the seal fails.

How urgent

Overflowing or leaking at the base: today. Running or weak flush: when it suits you.

Signs to look for

- Runs or refills on its own
- Water around the base
- Rocks when you sit
- Clogs often

Do this now

1. Turn the valve behind the toilet clockwise to stop water.
2. Lift the tank lid and check the flapper.
3. Don't keep flushing a clog.

What the pro will do

1. Replaces the flapper, fill valve or wax seal.
2. Resets or re-secures a rocking toilet.
3. Clears stubborn clogs with an auger.

> Not urgent unless it's overflowing or leaking at the base.

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06 CALL THIS WEEK

PROBLEM 6 OF 8

Leak under a sink or in a wall

CLUE	CHECK
Damp cabinet, stains, musty smell	**Water meter with taps off**

How to recognize it

A damp cabinet floor, drips from fittings, water stains on walls or ceilings, or a water bill that jumps.

Prevent it next time

- Look under sinks once a month with a flashlight.
- Replace braided supply lines every 5 to 8 years.
- Watch your water bill for unexplained jumps.

Why it matters

Slow leaks rot cabinets and subfloors and can lead to mold.

Signs to look for

- Damp or swollen cabinet base
- Drips from fittings
- Stains on walls or ceilings
- Meter moves with everything off

Do this now

1. Shut the fixture's supply valves.
2. Put a towel down to find the drip.
3. Photograph any staining.

What the pro will do

1. Traces the leak, sometimes with moisture meters.
2. Repairs or replaces the fitting, valve or pipe.
3. Points out any damage that needs drying or repair.

> Call this week. Small leaks grow.

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07 CALL THIS WEEK

PROBLEM 7 OF 8

Weak pressure or water line problem

IF ONE TAP
Clogged aerator or valve

IF EVERY TAP
Supply line or regulator

How to recognize it

Weak pressure at every fixture, wet spots in the yard over the line, or a sudden jump in the water bill.

Prevent it next time

- Know where the main shut-off and meter are.
- Ask about the pressure regulator if pressure swings.
- Keep heavy equipment off the line's path in the yard.

Why it matters

A leaking water line wastes water and can undermine the yard or foundation.

Signs to look for

- Weak pressure everywhere
- Soggy patch in the yard
- Hissing at the meter
- Higher water bill

Do this now

1. Check one tap's aerator first.
2. Ask neighbors if they have the same issue.
3. Watch the water meter with taps off.

What the pro will do

1. Measures water pressure and checks the regulator.
2. Checks the meter and main line for leaks.
3. Recommends repair or replacement of the line.

> Call this week; today if the yard is flooding.

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08 CALL TODAY

PROBLEM 8 OF 8

Gas smell

SMELLS LIKE	FIRST CALL
Rotten eggs or sulfur	**Your gas utility or 911**

How to recognize it

A rotten-egg smell near the stove, water heater or furnace, or a hissing sound at a gas line.

Prevent it next time

- Install a natural gas detector near gas appliances.
- Have gas appliances serviced on schedule.
- Know where the gas meter and shut-off are.

What to do

Leave the house first. Don't flip switches or use flames. Call your gas utility or 911 from outside, then a plumber for the repair.

Signs to look for

- Rotten-egg smell
- Hissing near a gas line
- Dead plants over the gas line
- Pilot lights going out

Do this now

1. Get everyone out of the house.
2. Don't use switches, phones or flames inside.
3. Call the gas utility or 911 from outside.

What the pro will do

1. Works after the utility has made the area safe.
2. Finds and repairs the leaking line or fitting.
3. Pressure-tests the gas line before it goes back in service.

> Leave now and call your gas utility. A plumber can repair the line once it's safe.

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SIDE BY SIDE

Tell common problems apart

Two mix-ups that change what kind of help you need.

Clogged drain or sewer line?

	Clogged drain	Main sewer line
DRAINS AFFECTED	One fixture	Several at once
FLOOR DRAIN OR TUB	Fine	Backs up first
WHEN WASHER RUNS	No effect	Tub or floor drain bubbles
FIX	Clear one drain	Clear or repair the main line

Water heater: repair or replace?

	Often repaired	Often replaced
AGE	Under 8 years	Over 10 years
PROBLEM	Element, thermostat, valve	Leaking tank
HOT WATER	Inconsistent	Rusty or none
NOISE	Occasional	Loud rumbling

Still not sure? Describe what you see on the phone and a local pro can tell you which it is.

HOW TO

Before you call

Find your main valve

It's usually where the water line enters: basement, garage or near the meter. Turn it clockwise to shut it.

Make it safe

Turn off power to wet areas at the breaker, from a dry spot.

Take photos

Photograph the leak, the fixture and any damage.

Check the meter

With every tap off, a moving meter means a hidden leak.

Note the pattern

One drain or many? Hot water or cold? These details help the plumber.

Gas smell? Leave

Get out first, then call your gas utility or 911.

FILL THIS IN TODAY

My home at a glance

Five minutes now spares you a scramble later. Keep this page with the guide.

Main water shut-off valve is located:

Water heater: gas or electric, and the year installed:

Gas shut-off valve is located:

Electrical panel is located:

Sewer cleanout is located:

Plumber we used before, and their number:

Notes:

THROUGH THE YEAR

Plumbing through the year

A few minutes each season heads off the most common problems.

Winter

- Insulate pipes in unheated spaces.
- Drip faucets on outside walls in hard freezes.
- Know how to shut off the main water fast.
- Keep the house at 55°F or warmer when away.

Spring

- Check outdoor faucets for leaks after the freeze.
- Test the sump pump by pouring water into the pit.
- Look under sinks for slow drips.
- Clear yard drains before heavy rain.

Summer

- Watch for slow drains from extra laundry and guests.
- Check washer hoses for bulges or cracks.
- Keep grease out of the disposal after cookouts.
- Look for soggy spots over the water line.

Fall

- Disconnect and drain garden hoses.
- Flush the water heater to clear sediment.
- Insulate exposed pipes before the first freeze.
- Note the water heater's age on its label.

QUESTIONS

Plumbing questions

How do I know if it's a clog or a sewer line problem?

If only one drain is slow, it's usually a local clog. If several drains back up at once, or the tub bubbles when the toilet flushes, suspect the main sewer line.

Why do my drains gurgle?

Gurgling often means air is trapped by a partial blockage or a venting problem. Gurgling in several drains points to the main line.

Is a burst pipe an emergency?

Yes. Shut off the main valve and call right away.

How do I find my main water shut-off?

Look where the water line enters the house: basement wall, utility room, garage, crawl space or near the meter outside.

Why is there no hot water?

Common causes are a tripped breaker, an out pilot light, a failed heating element or a worn-out tank.

Why is my water heater leaking from the bottom?

A leak from the tank itself usually means the tank is failing. Shut the cold supply and power, then call.

Plumbing questions (continued)

Why does my toilet keep running?

Usually a worn flapper or a fill valve set too high. It's not urgent, but it wastes water.

Are chemical drain cleaners safe?

They can damage older pipes and are dangerous if a plumber then has to open the line. A plunger or a plumber is the safer option.

What causes weak water pressure in the whole house?

A failing pressure regulator, a partly closed main valve, buildup in old pipes or a leak in the supply line.

What should I do if I smell gas?

Leave the house, don't use switches or flames, and call your gas utility or 911 from outside.

How do I know if I have a hidden leak?

Turn off every tap and watch the water meter. If it moves, water is going somewhere.

Can a plumber come the same day?

Often, depending on your area and their schedule. Same-day service is subject to availability.

CUT OUT AND KEEP

When something goes wrong

1. Stop the water: turn the main shut-off valve clockwise.
2. Make it safe: switch off power to wet areas from a dry spot.
3. Smell gas? Leave the house and call your gas utility or 911 from outside.
4. Sewage backing up? Stop using all water and drains.
5. Take photos of the leak, the water and any damage.
6. Call a plumber and describe what you see.

KEEP THIS NUMBER IN YOUR PHONE

(833) 835-1569

Scan for the online guide

with the 60-second problem finder and more answers.

drainresponsepros.com/plumbing-problem-guide/

KEEP HANDY

Important numbers

Fill these in now, so you're not searching when something goes wrong.

Emergency: 911

Gas utility emergency line

Water utility

Electric utility

Plumber

Neighbor with a spare key

Policy number for your home

YOUR LOCAL PRO LINE

(833) 835-1569



Notes

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

DrainResponsePros

DrainResponsePros connects homeowners with independent local plumbing companies for clogged drains, sewer lines, leaks, water heaters and emergencies.

How we're paid

DrainResponsePros is a referral service. Homeowners don't pay us. Independent local companies in our network pay us when we connect them with homeowners who call. We don't perform the work, and any work, timing and terms are agreed directly between you and the company.

Important

This guide is general information, not advice for your specific home. Every home is different. In an emergency, or if anyone is in danger, call 911 first. Before you hire anyone, confirm they hold the credentials required for the work in your area. Same-day service is subject to availability. Calls may be recorded for quality purposes.

Photos

Photographs are stock images from Pexels and Unsplash, used under each site's terms, to illustrate common problems. They don't show specific companies, jobs or customers. Any people shown are models.

What's wrong with my plumbing?
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