

Under pressure to perform-If pipes could talk

If you are like most homeowners, you normally give the plumbing systems in your house as much thought as the food at the back of your refrigerator. In our minds there is simply no room to worry about it until it is a major problem. Coincidentally, the forgotten food and the neglected plumbing can have a lot of the same characteristics if ignored.

Plumbing systems are vital to a house's operations, and fortunately, don't take a lot of effort to maintain. In most homes, these systems include water supply, waste, and fuel supply.

It is important to know the locations of the main shut off valves for the water and fuel supply lines. The main water shut-off valve is normally located on the water meter if you have city water or at pressure tank/pump if you have well water. The main gas shut off valve is located at the gas meter on the outside of the building (for most natural gas hookups). It usually is on the main supply line coming out of the ground. You will likely need a wrench or screwdriver to turn this valve to the off position, so it is a good idea to attach one to the meter in case of emergency. Looking for a suitable wrench during a stressful situation, such as a major gas leak, can reveal things about our character that should remain hidden.

Periodically check the fittings on the water pipes to make sure they are not corroding. If galvanized and copper pipes are connected with unapproved connectors there will be corrosion where they meet. This is due to the galvanic reaction that takes place when two dissimilar metals meet.

Old horizontal copper pipes can develop a pattern of pinholes on the bottom of the supply lines because of the galvanic reaction from the minerals in the water with the copper pipe itself. If you see small green dots on the bottom of the pipes, you can be quite certain that holes will soon appear. You may see water stains on the floor first (or on the newly installed ceiling). This is good reason why you should not finish your basement ceiling without creating large access areas to these pipes.

Over time, galvanized pipes tend to corrode on the inside and eventually close up. They need to be replaced when either the pressure to your faucets is very low, or the drain lines cannot be cleaned out. Plumb Clean, a non-chemical type cleaner works biologically to clean slow drains. It will not clean completely stopped up drains, but uses enzymes to eat the crud that slows down normal drains.

Gas lines are typically maintenance free. You should be able to smell any leaks that pop up. In this case I would recommend leaving the house and shutting off the main valve with the wrench that you have now attached to the gas meter.