

# The water heater maintenance that's too often overlooked

By Michele Lerner  
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**A**fter months with everyone in your household staying at home, your appliances are probably getting more of a workout than usual. Although many homeowners have a maintenance contract on their heating and air conditioning system, they don't always pay as much attention to another essential appliance: the water heater.

We asked Dustin Bowerman, director of corporate training and product support for Bradford White, a water heater manufacturer, for advice on how to keep a tank-style water heater in good working order.

"Equipment like water heaters can be costly to repair or replace, but just like an oil change for a car, proactive maintenance can keep these systems running better for a long time to come," Bowerman wrote in an email.

Many maintenance tasks require a skilled professional, but there are some things homeowners can do themselves, Bowerman said. First, he recommends reading the water heater manual to understand how often maintenance needs to be done.

When homeowners purchase a new water heater, they may be able to sign up for a maintenance plan, Bowerman wrote. Some contractors also offer a water-heater-only plan or a plumbing system maintenance plan.

According to Bowerman, a professional maintenance plan typically includes:

- Checking or replacing the anode rod, which helps prolong the life of the tank



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Although many homeowners get maintenance on their heating and cooling system, they don't always pay as much attention to another essential appliance: the water heater.

- Checking or replacing the temperature and pressure relief valve, a safety device located on the top or side of all water heaters

- Inspecting the main and pilot burners if the water heater is gas-fired

- Cleaning inside the main burner assembly

- Inspecting the vent system

- Draining the water heater tank

Home Depot recommends draining your water heater every six months, while consumer review site Angie's List and heating and plumbing contractor Cropp Metcalfe recommend draining it annually. If you live in an area with hard water, you may need to drain your water heater more frequently. If you notice that you run out of hot water more frequently than in the past, it may be time to drain your water heater tank.

"This is a task some homeowners may do themselves, but it should be performed during regularly scheduled professional maintenance, too," Bowerman wrote.

A water heater can run

less efficiently or even fail eventually if water isn't drained regularly, wrote Bowerman, because sediment from the water settles to the bottom of the tank over time. On an electric model, the sediment will cover the heating elements.

"If homeowners decide to drain the water heater themselves, they need to proceed with caution," wrote Bowerman. "Follow the directions in the owners manual and remember that the water coming from the heater will be extremely hot."

Homeowners should also inspect their water heater to look for water around the base or along connection points to the water pipes. Water in those locations may indicate a leak, wrote Bowerman, in which case a plumbing professional should be called to do a more thorough inspection.

"The average life span of a water heater is 10 to 15 years, but with proactive maintenance, homeowners can ensure their water heater will make it to the upper end of that time frame," wrote Bowerman.