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Hidden costs of plumbing

By **DARREN CLANCY**

Avoid a problem of Titanic proportions with outdoor plumbing maintenance.

Outdoor plumbing can create most costly, scary and unpleasant issues you can face as a home owner. No, this isn't a reference to your outdoor toilets.

Australian homes often have outdoor plumbing that suffers from neglect. Sadly, the problem is usually only addressed before it's too late.

What can you do to prevent outdoor plumbing issues blowing up? Prevention is definitely better than cure when it comes to these water fixtures and piping systems!

Here's a brief guide to your outdoor plumbing and its health and maintenance.

Water, water everywhere

Removing excess water and funneling it to the storm water system where it belongs is what helps maintain a liveable house. The last thing you want is a blocked gutter to send water into your roof or walls, or to discover your drains and downpipes are creating pools under your house and undermining foundations.

Try these tips to keep your home structurally sound, no matter the weather:

- Guttering and downpipes must be rust free clear of leaf litter and dirt.
- Cleaning and unblocking

gutters and downpipes before storms is a must, as is a regular 6 to 12 month spit and polish.

■ Place outdoor furniture and plants out of the way so water can quickly escape into drainage outlets

■ Consider choosing a porous concrete for your driveway or making use of rainwater gardens

■ Always aim to go with the flow with storm water.

Backed up, blocked up and unhappy

There's nothing worse than a backed up toilet or backyard sewerage issues. Yet so many people unknowingly put the health of their sewer pipes in jeopardy.

A toilet is only designed to take away bodily waste and toilet paper. Items such as food and fat, sanitary items, nappies, grease, rags and paper will clog your sewer pipes. Even so-called 'flushable' wipes are an emergency plumbing call waiting to happen. Always think before you flush.

Unclogging sewer pipes is a job for a trained professional. Pipes let off gases that can harm if inhaled; they can even be fatal. Your licensed plumber will use high-powered jets to break down and dislodge any foreign material.

Cracking under pressure

Next is preventing sewer pipe breakage. Older suburbs

run on 100 year-old clay pipes that become brittle over time.

It's a matter of when, not if, an old clay sewer will need to be replaced as the ground shifts, tree roots invade and terracotta deteriorates over time. If you plan renovations, never connect onto old sewer. The investment needed during building works or major renovations will range from a few thousand to \$10000+ to replace your sewer but the cost savings and heartache you'll avoid would be worth ten times more if a problem occurs post renovations.

You can also check that the sewer has been replaced so you don't buy a lemon by checking a property's drainage diagram.

Drip fed problems

Designed to drip water strategically to sustain plant-life, irrigation is a great idea for lawns and the family veggie patch. Poorly maintained irrigation can cost a pretty penny if you are not careful.

A pressure regulator will avoid blowing valves or parts of the irrigation system. Keep them clear of leaf litter and mud. Adding a filter helps keep debris out. Change the filter at the beginning of summer so that when your irrigation is in use the most, your water is the clearest it can be.

For bonus points, hook your irrigation to a grey water supply to recycle your water. This is a great way to recycle

water, save on your water bill and help the environment.

The costly leak

A dripping tap can waste 20,000 litres of water a year. Yet garden taps, hose fixtures, pipes and pools often spend their life in your garden with minimal attention until things go wrong.

Check your outdoor water fixtures every six months. Change washers, check your hoses and pipes for leaks, and be on the lookout for seepage near the pool area.

While it is difficult to deep clean your pool filters during peak usage in the summer-time, factor in a good cleanse in the cooler months. You can also check your jets are in working order at the same time and make sure your pump is good to go to keep your pool in tip-top shape.

Mapping your plumbing to health

Looking after outdoor plumbing health is crucial. An unattended leak, an unexpected clogging of pipes and lines, or unfettered drainage can cost you thousands in repairs. Not to mention the sanitation risks and time wasted.

Creating a routine checklist and a map of all your water fixtures, pipes and physical water drainage spots can help you to maintain outside plumbing better.

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