

## **Unexpected High Water Bill? Check the Toilets First by the Saving Water Partnership**

If the water bills in your building have jumped unexpectedly and you don't know why, the first place to check should be your toilets.

Eventually, all toilets are going to be in need of some type of repair to keep them functioning properly. Just like anything else with moving parts, good maintenance can keep them working well and can lower your operating (utility) costs.

The vast majority of toilets function by means of a fill valve/supply tube (to let water in) and a flapper (to let water out). When you purchase replacement parts for a broken toilet, be sure to get ones that are good quality. A flapper may go bad in 10 weeks or it may last 10 years. But, eventually it will bend, break, deteriorate or somehow leak. Some studies report that, at any given time, about 20% of all toilets are leaking.

These days many replacement flappers are made to be chlorine-resistant. These products are typically distinguished by being red, blue or clear. The old standard black rubber flapper will deteriorate quickly (ever have your hands get stained when touching a flapper? – that's because it is falling apart). Spend the extra dollar or two and get the chlorine-resistant flappers, which can last years longer.

Also, make sure to get a flapper made specifically for your toilet, if possible. There are a number of universal flappers, which may fit your toilet but can result in more water use with each flush. If you have to get a universal flapper, get one with a dial to adjust the flush. Test it at the lowest possible water use, and only adjust it higher until it provides an acceptable flush. If the old flapper has a float on the chain, make sure the new one does – or put the float from the old flapper on the new chain. If you remove the float, the toilet can use of to two gallons more per flush, costing up to \$75 per toilet per year in water/sewer costs.

Over time, the fill valves will also go bad. Many manufacturers are moving away from the old float ball and arm valve to a pedestal type fill valve, which has the float right on the pedestal tube. The pedestal type of product has a reputation of being much more reliable and is typically fairly easy to install and adjust. The float ball and arm type of valve has a reputation for hanging up against the edge of the tank, as well as “creeping up” the water level over time, making water leak over the overflow tube.

You should check your toilets for leaks at least once a year, and on unit turnover. When testing a toilet for leaks, it is important to actually flush the toilet. When doing this, make sure the flapper and other moving parts don't “hang up” which is the cause of many high water consumption issues. And don't assume tenants will tell you if a toilet is leaking. If you have an unexpected bill and want to find the cause, the first step should be to check the toilets ... EVERY toilet.

Some innovative products don't use flappers, including pressure-assist toilets and “flapperless” toilets. However, even these products can leak over time due to rubber rings used to keep the water out. Generally, they do provide a longer service life before needing repairs than flapper-type toilets.

### **Checking for Toilet Leaks**

1. Remove the tank lid. (The water is clean until it enters the bowl).

2. Add a few drops of food coloring to the tank the change the color of the water. Don't flush the toilet.
3. After 15-30 minutes, lift the seat and look in the bowl. If you see colored water, you have a leak. The leak could be the result of a bad flapper or water flowing over the overflow tube.

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