How to Flush a Hot Water Heater

Water heaters should be flushed at least once a year -- twice a year is even better -- to control the build-up of mineral deposits. This will help the water heater operate more fuel efficiently and will usually extend the life of the heater.

Furthermore, the water heater will need to be flushed if the hot water becomes a yellow or brownish color due to an accumulation of rust, or if you find sand-like mineral sediment in the hot water.

The procedure for flushing your water heater is outlined in the following steps. Refer to the diagram of a water heater below as necessary.

1. Do <u>not</u> shut off the gas or the water supply to the heater.
2. Attach a garden hose to the draincock located at the bottom of the heater. The draincock usually looks like a regular hose bib (garden faucet) or a round dial with a threaded hole in the middle.
3. Extend the garden hose to a place where the water can safely exit the heater (e.g., a drain, a driveway, etc.)
4. Open the draincock to allow the water to exit the heater. **Caution: the water leaving the heater will be hot and under normal household water pressure.** Also note that if the draincock is made of plastic and the heater is several years old, it may be difficult to open and may break easily if forced.
5. After five minutes of flushing, fill a bucket with the still flushing water.
6. Allow the water in the bucket to stand undisturbed for a minute and see if the water is clear or if any sand-like material settles to the bottom. If the water is clear and no sand-like material is observed, go on to step 7. If the water is discolored and/or sand-like material is observed at the bottom of the bucket, repeat steps 5 and 6 until the flush water is completely clear and free of sediment.
7. Close the draincock and remove the garden hose.

If you do not feel comfortable doing this work yourself, hire a licensed plumber to do it for you.

1 Electric
2 Gas

A Cold in
B Hot out
C Shutoff valve
D Temperature /pressure relief valve
E Insulation
F Outer case
G Anode rod
H Thermostat
I Electric heating elements
J Drain Valve
K Burner control
L Dip tube
M Overflow
N Steel tank
O Burner

©2000 How Stuff Works