

Your Water Heater Could Be Full of Mineral Sludge



MESSAGE FROM
GENERAL MANAGER AND CEO JERRY D. WILLIAMS

RECENTLY MY WATER HEATER AT MY HOUSE started leaking. If you have never experienced a leaking water heater then most likely your time is coming. Going through the experience has caused me to reflect on some issues that may help you avoid the experience. The first lesson is that federal standards for electric and gas water heaters used for residential purposes were changed a couple years ago.

By now virtually every store has sold their entire old inventory and everything you buy must comply with the new federal standards. There is nothing wrong with an appliance being more energy efficient but there can be issues with how that efficiency is achieved. Water heaters are actually fairly simple appliances. They look big and intimidating, but there is really not much to them. I will concentrate on electric water heaters, like mine, but gas water heaters have similar issues.

Water heaters are now fatter! For years we have been recommending folks add a fiberglass blanket around the water heater tank to keep the water hot for a longer period of time. The extra insulation is now being installed at the factory, under the exterior tin jacket.

If your house was constructed with the water heater snugly fitting into the spot, then you could have problems finding a replacement. My water heater fits neatly between a return air duct and the inside air conditioning unit. When my house was built in 2003 there were many water heaters that could fit in that 19 inch space, but that has all changed.

Most water heaters are now around 21-22 inches wide. Once I showed my wife the cold water cut off valve that is located directly above most water heaters, the flow into the closet was stopped and the carpet was rolled back. While she was mopping up water, I began to hunt for a solution. Flip the breaker, disconnect the water pipes and electric wires was a breeze. Now the mission was to find a replacement to get things back to normal. Yes, I could have called a plumber but he would shop for a replacement water heater the same place as me. A slim tank was located and could arrive in about a week. Seems slim tanks are still made that comply with the new standards by increasing their height, but no one stocks them. A week without hot water may be ok with you, but you can expect opposition from the wife.

After a lot of searching, I found a distributor that had a 30

gallon water heater that would fit. This was a stepdown from the old 50 gallon tank, but would allow me to move forward.

The next problem was getting it home. It could be laid down inside the Tahoe but that may damage the internal glass lining. I drove all the way home (in the country) to get my pickup so the new water heater could be transported standing up and strapped to the cab. I wanted to do it right because there was only one water heater in the entire town that would fit and I wanted it to last.

Most water heaters are simply a steel tank covered with a thick layer of insulation and a thin jacket of tin on the outside. The factory coats the inside with glass, which keeps the water away from the steel tank. Water heater boxes are usually very clear in their warnings about not tipping the box over the edge of a pickup tailgate or any tip over that could result in fracturing the glass lining. Even a microscopic fracture of the glass lining will allow the water to start rusting a hole in the tank. A very small crack may take years, but eventually a hole will appear.

When I turned around, after paying for the new water heater, a fellow approached me and reported that I was all ready to go! He had already loaded my new water heater and was grinning because of the good deed. Sure enough, the new water heater had been laid over the back of my tailgate and slid into the truck bed. When asked, he proudly proclaimed "I have been loading them like that for 30 years". I guess he never put any thought into why he keeps selling replacement water heaters.

Today's water heaters with more insulation around the steel tank have a better chance of surviving without fracturing the glass lining, but transporting upright will certainly increase your odds of going many years without a flooded house.

When giving members tips on saving energy I have seldom included the instruction of draining some water from the bottom of the water heater every month. I don't know anyone that follows this recommendation, including me. Every water heater owner's manual or warranty I have ever read, pretty much had the same advice.

The Rheem owner's manual states: "A water heater's tank can act as a setting basin for solids suspended in the water. It is therefore not uncommon for hard water deposits to accumulate in the bottom of the tank. It is suggested that a few quarts



of water be drained from the water heater's tank every month to clean the tank of these deposits." I was feeling pretty good knowing that I had drained a few quarts of water from my water heater; twice in 7 years! That is a far shot from the recommended once a month.

When I attempted to unscrew the lower heating element from my old water heater, it seemed to be stuck inside the tank. The bottom heating element is located about 10 inches from the bottom of the tank, and it was fully submerged in about three or four gallons of mineral flakes. The tank had accumulated all these mineral flakes in only 13 years. To give you the idea, I took a picture with about a quart of the mineral flakes poured on top of my heater element lying on my desk.



You can imagine how much efficiency was being lost trying to heat water with a red hot heating element that is packed in a pile of mineral flakes. The mineral flakes off of the top and bottom heating elements and accumulate in the bottom of the tank. If not cleaned out, the flakes will continue to accumulate till they cover the entire bottom element; just like my tank. The minerals make the water taste good, but all the while they are accumulating in the bottom of every water heater.

I have concluded that it is probably a good idea to consider replacing your water heater if it is over 12 years old. Most likely the warranty was only good for 6-7 years. The average lifespan of a water heater in this area is 8-12 years. Replacing the water heater before it starts to leak will help you avoid a flooded house (especially if it happens when no one is home) and possibly save on mildew smelling carpet. This plan would allow you to measure your water heater space and order a water heater that will fit.

Besides getting a better insulated water heater; think of how much electricity you will save by using a heating element surrounded by water instead of mineral flakes. Now that you know what that drain spigot is for, you can attach a garden hose and drain a few gallons each month.

If your water heater has been in place for several years, you could remove the lower heating element and use a wet vacuum to suck out mineral flakes. A 30 inch section of old garden hose makes an excellent snout on the end of the vacuum hose. Expect the garden hose to get plugged up with flakes every minute or so, but a few hours labor will remove the flakes or try saving up and order a new water heater to avoid soaking the carpet and your wallet.



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Jonesboro Crossing: The Original Gateway to Texas



HISTORY IS RARELY AT THE TOP OF YOUNG STUDENTS' lists of favorite school subjects. However, as adults, it is easier to see the importance of past events, circumstances and people. History is what helped us arrive at the world we live in today—for better or for worse. Lamar Electric's service territory is rich with history, and only a few of our members know much about the interesting past that lies right beneath our feet.

There is a group of historical markers near the Red River on a plot of land known as Sam Houston Park. These four historical markers and a gravestone memorialize the town of Jonesboro and the people who lived in the area long ago.

Jonesboro, a town along the Texas side of the Red River



BY KATIE MORRIS

named for ferry operator Henry Jones (1789–1861), was located at one of the first known crossings of the Red River. The ferry crossing, called Jonesboro Crossing, was just northwest of Clarksville near an area we today call Kiomatia.

According to historian Robin Cole Jett of the website Red River Historian, the town of Jonesboro was quite popular at one time and had a hotel, blacksmith shop and several warehouses. Well-known men such as Sam Houston, Davy

Crockett, Benjamin Milam and Stephen F. Austin entered our great state via Jonesboro Crossing.

The Texas State Historical Association notes that Jonesboro was not considered a part of Texas until 1836. Prior to that year,



1. A view of Sam Houston Park from FM 410.

2. An informative historical marker dedicated to the town of Jonesboro.

3. Jesse B. Bowman lived for a time in this area before he died at the Battle of the Alamo.

4. Jane Chandler Gill's gravestone.

5. This marker was erected by the state of Texas in 1936. It reads, "Near here at the old Jonesboro Crossing, Sam Houston, an envoy of President Andrew Jackson, first set foot on Texas soil December 2, 1832."

6. The site of Sam Houston Park is dedicated to the memory of Red River County pioneers James Henry Johnston and James E. and Elizabeth Johnston Ferguson.

7. Jane Chandler Gill was one of the first Caucasian settlers buried in Texas. She was 34 years old when she died.

the town served as the seat of Miller County, Arkansas, also known as Old Miller County, which stretched at one time as far as present-day Fannin and Hunt counties in Texas. According to findings from the Central Arkansas Library System, this was problematic at the time because Mexico claimed much of what is now East Texas. Texas declared independence from Mexico in 1836, and Old Miller County was dissolved a couple years later. Present-day Miller County begins on the Arkansas side of Texarkana.

Unfortunately, the bustling town of Jonesboro was wiped out by a flash flood in the 1840s. It is suspected that many of the graves floated away with the floodwaters, but one remained. The gravestone of Jane Chandler Gill, who died in 1846, shortly after making the Red River crossing, can be found at Sam

Houston Park, where several of the town's other citizens are memorialized today. One historical marker at the park is dedicated to Jesse B. Bowman, who once lived near Jonesboro before he went on to fight to his death at the Alamo. Another marker is dedicated to James Henry Johnston and James E. and Elizabeth Johnston Ferguson, who were considered Red River County pioneers.

Sam Houston Park is located off FM 410, a few miles south of the intersection of FM 2353 and FM 2381/FM 410. The area has a spot to stop and park your car while viewing the historical markers.

Continue to look into what other history is hidden within our service area. There are many great resources online and at your local library.