BLUEGRASS OWNER'S

BASIC MAINTENANCE GUIDE

WATER HEATERS

Water heaters failing seem to become a common occurrence lately in our community. As a reminder, the expected "life" of a water heater is 7-10 years, in reasonable conditions. All water heaters at Bluegrass were installed in 2006-2007, or even prior to that. So every owner should consider replacing it as soon as possible before any damages caused by it occur. Also the expansion tank should be replaced every 5 years. Please take it seriously before "disaster" happens.

Periodically check the water supply lines and the valves for any sign of water. Mineral deposits around the connections might also indicate imminent failure. Rust is an obvious sign of a slow water leak. That includes the expansion tank connected to the water heater. If the water heater fails suddenly (cracks or leaks) turn off the water closing the valve located right above the tank.

Inspect the tray under the heater for any sign of water. If you see even a small amount that means the heater started cracking at the bottom. Five minutes of your time periodically spent checking could save you days of headaches and quite a bit of money.
Also part of the maintenance of your water heater should be the annual flushing of the tank. Contact me for more details on how to do that.

If any sudden leak or flood happens (i.e. pipe burst etc.), turn off the water in your entire apartment. You can do that by closing the valve located under one of your bathroom sinks, next to the water meter (see picture). By doing this you minimize tremendously the extent of the damage. It is extremely important to know the location of this valve. Even five minutes sooner make a huge difference when a major water leak happens.

A great and cheap investment would be the installation inside the tray of a water sensor alarm like the one depicted in the picture. You can find it here: http://www.homedepot.com/p/Basement-Watchdog-Battery-Operated-Water-Alarm-BWD-HWA/100038838 This device can be installed pretty much anywhere, including laundry.

KITCHEN AREA

Do not clutter the space under the sink making it inaccessible. Inspect this space every month, at least, to make sure there are no leaks. Water under the sink can be the result of multiple issues. Do not ignore it. Check the supply lines and the valves first.

If you see water coming out of the air gap, it means the dishwasher's drain line is clogged. This is caused by dirty dishes not pre-washed prior to putting them in the dishwasher. The air gap can clog too but most of time is just the hose. In the next picture I will show you how to unclog it.

Remove the black rubber hose and clean it thoroughly. I personally find it easier if I squeeze it all the way, then drop a large screwdriver through it and pull it out through the other end. You can use some kind of stick too. Then rinse it well. If you look from one end you should be able to see perfectly through the hose. Also clean the part of the garbage disposal where the hose connects to. Put everything back together. By the way, you might be shocked to see what you find inside and how nasty this is.

Over the years owners called to report the kitchen sink leaking. Half of the time it turned out to be the metal coupling that connects the drain assembly (P-trap) to the sink itself (see small metal coupling in the picture). This coupling is not the right size (too small) and it tends to come loose over the years. I recommend replacing it with a PVC one, which has more threads to grab on.

Do not throw large quantities of leftover food into the sink and the garbage disposal. Use a strainer to recover most of it and throw it in the trash or toilet. These disposals are not industrial grade to handle pots of food waste. The worst things you can throw in the sink are rice and grease of any kind because they stick to the drain pipe walls and build up over time causing eventually sewer back up. After running the disposal leave hot water running for a couple of minutes.

A lot of small leaks are caused by the sink faucet. The part that you pull out tends to unscrew over time and if not noticed, it will leak under the sink without even seeing it. You just need to hand tighten it. As an extra step you can add Teflon tape on the threads before screwing it back in. Check it every once in a while to make sure it didn't come loose.

Pay attention to the area in front of the dishwasher. If you see large amounts of water on the floor you might have 2 problems. 1) The door seal is damaged. 2) The pump located under is leaking. The second one is harder to find. You need to take off the bottom cover of the dishwasher in order to look under.

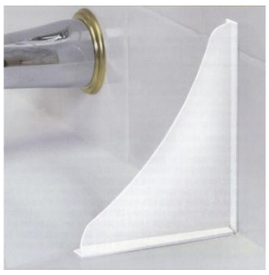
BATHROOM AREA

Do not clutter the space under the sink making it inaccessible. Inspect this space every month, at least, to make sure there are no leaks. Hitting the drain assembly multiple times can make the couplings and gaskets to come loose. Also check the supply lines and the valves.

Caulking around the bath tub is <u>essential</u>. Make sure that is intact and not separated from the wall. If it is missing in some areas you might end up with a lot of damage in your unit and not only. If it needs to be replaced, scrape it all off and start fresh. You can use painter's tape (see picture) to help you make it look professional. I recommend re-caulking the bath tubs every year with <u>silicone</u> caulking.

Pay attention to the tub spout. If you see water coming from under it when you pull the switch, it means that the built-in gasket is damaged and the spout needs to be replaced. If you don't do that the water might "shoot" back into the wall where you can't see it and cause a lot of damage. To remove the spout you need an Allen key (Hex key) and can be tricky sometimes. When you install the new one do not over tighten it because you might perforate the copper line.

The overflow gasket is <u>extremely important</u> because it can cause a lot of damage without being noticed immediately. In the past we had cases where the damages exceeded $10,000. And all this because of a part that costs $3 (in store at Ace Hardware or at Home Depot online) and can be installed in 5 minutes. I suggest replacing it every year, especially if you are taking baths. In order to replace it you need to remove the cover completely but it is held in place by only 2 screws.



A lot of residents report water on the floor next to the bath tub. This is (most of the time) just water running off the tub. A sign that you have a problem like this is the increase in size (cracking) of the baseboard next to the tub. To prevent this you can install splash guards (see picture).

Make sure that the shower head is not leaking or spraying water on the walls above. If you replace it make sure the new one is tight, seal it with Teflon tape and do not over tighten it. When you do it hold the extension in place, not to come loose inside the wall. Oversized shower heads tend to spray a lot more water around increasing the chance of getting water on the walls.

Another common problem in the bathrooms is water around the toilet. Rarely the culprit is a supply line or the tank. Most of the time this is the result of the condensation on the tank and bowl. For more information about it read this article:
http://www.wikihow.com/Stop-Toilet-Tank-Sweating
If you have vinyl flooring in your bathrooms and see dark spots on it that might be caused by a faulty wax ring or some other kind of water leak. Investigate it immediately.

LAUNDRY AREA

Check the water supply lines and the valves of the washing machine for any water leaks, look behind the machine periodically. Also make sure that the drain hose is inserted properly into the drain and secured with a zip tie or something similar.

Over the years we had incidents where the “original” washing machines installed by the developer failed and flooded the apartments. This particular machine is made by GE and is top load. The sensor controlling the water flow failed, most likely due to a clog, and the water overflowed from the machine flooding multiple units. Have a specialist check it out periodically if you are not able to do it on your own.

OTHER LIVING SPACES

Do not ignore any sign of mold anywhere in your house. Mold doesn't disappear from thin air on its own. One owner told me he noticed some mold on his bathroom wall before he left town for a couple of weeks but he thought it will disappear. By the time he came back the damage was so extensive that the entire bathroom had to be torn apart. In common living spaces (bedrooms, closets & living room) most of the problems are caused by lack of ventilation or bad weather strips.

A lot of residents report mold on the inside frame of the back door (dining room area). This is caused mainly by bad weather stripping which generates condensation, especially on the hinges. After a while mold starts growing. If this happens in your unit replace the weather stripping and that should solve the problem. Don't forget that these are metal doors and are prone to condensation if not protected properly around the edges. Cleaning mold pretty much anywhere can be done using a dilution of bleach and water.

Another common issue reported frequently is mold in the closets of the master bedrooms in units located at the end of the buildings (3 bedrooms). This is caused by lack of ventilation and clutter in that area. Open the windows as often as you can. Also keep the window vent (see picture) open all the time if possible. This will prevent moisture getting trapped in those tight spaces and the growth of mold. If you already found mold, use a dilution (half bleach, half water) to clean it. Do not scrub too hard on walls; you will remove the drywall texture! Do it in stages allowing the wall to dry out in between.

After taking a shower or a bath leave the bathroom fan running for 15 minutes to remove all the steam and moisture from the air. It is recommended to have the bathroom fans running a few hours daily. By doing this and having the window vents open will help air circulate throughout your apartment. Opening the windows at least a few minutes every day is even better, especially during the cold seasons.

Some residents reported water standing in the window track (left picture). This happens rarely due to condensation on the window. Most of the time is just rain pushed by the wind in between the fixed and the sliding windows. All this water should drain outside. But if the "weep hole" (right picture) is closed or clogged the water will not drain. You can open and/or clean the weep hole by removing the screen from inside.

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