

On-demand water heater leaves would-be bather waiting in the cold

DEAR MS. GREEN,

I have an on-demand hot water heater, which is supposed to be more energy efficient than other hot water heaters, yet the water warms up so slowly that I feel like I waste a lot of water when I'm trying to shower or wash my face at night. I'm not talking 20 -30 seconds of waiting. I'm talking several minutes. This doesn't seem right. I've had my builder out to look at the unit and he hasn't found anything wrong with it but there has to be a solution besides replacing the thing – it's only a year old – but I don't want to waste energy OR water.

Cold in Chatham

DEAR COLD,

At first, Ms. Green was puzzled by this as she also has an on-demand hot water heater and her water is almost always immediately hot. But when Ms. Green spoke to her better, smarter half, he explained that this is actually a common complaint of people with on-demand water heaters, and when ours was installed we took steps to make sure this wouldn't happen: our heater is about six feet from two of our three bathrooms and so the lag that can occur when unheated water flushes through the pipes is barely noticeable. If your house isn't designed so that all the bathrooms are close to one another and also close to your water heater then you will have to wait longer



for the water to heat up.

That said, waiting minutes for hot water seems excessive. If you're absolutely sure that your water heater was installed correctly (because incorrect installation and wrong sizing of pipes can be a culprit) and moving it closer to your bathrooms or kitchens isn't a possibility, then there are a couple of fixes that might work for you.

One possibility is installing an after-market recirculation system. This will send the cold water back to the heater and the hot water out, but since they're after-market they may void the warranty on your on-demand heater, so be sure to investigate this before doing it.

Another thing to think about is whether or not your fixtures, like your shower head or the aerator in your faucet, is low flow. If it is, then it will take that much longer for the cold water to pass through. A fix for that would be to install a faster flow fixture. You are wasting as much water, however, but you are not waiting as long. So the waiting problem may be solved, but the wasting problem

may not.

A final possibility, if you don't want to install the recirculation pump and you've checked the bathroom's anti-scald mechanism, is to change your behavior. The water to your shower may take a while to heat up, for example, but once it's hot it'll be hot for the next person and the next. If your family can all take showers in a cluster then only the first person will need to wait. You could also collect that initial cold water and use it to water your plants or use it in other ways.

DEAR MS. GREEN,

What is the most humane and environmentally conscious way to get rid of mice?

Overrun by Rodents in Ramseur

DEAR OVERRUN,

Ms. Green is disgusted, horrified, and well-versed in your situation. Her old farmhouse may be sealed up tight enough to keep wayward, energy-sucking drafts from hiking up her energy bills, but she still has a problem with these terrifying varmints. To top that off, Ms. Green has a slight phobia of rodents. This makes her particularly sensitive to your dilemma.

For the record, Ms. Green has tried to be both humane and environmentally conscious in mice removal efforts and has discovered that neither is particularly effective for the Chatham county super-mice that live in her pantry. The only thing that seems to catch her mice is the

very inhumane glue trap. Ms. Green has tried a variety of kinder, gentler traps and they don't seem to be very effective, but maybe your mice, Overrun, are not as wily and evil as Ms. Green's mice who she hears squeak in glee as they steal the bait and poop in your silverware drawer. Perhaps you still have some gentle thoughts towards the wild creatures who are simply trying to adapt and perpetuate their species, preferably not in your bread box.

On PETA's website is a trap that seems to be getting good feedback: the Humane Smart Mousetrap. Ms. Green has not used this trap – she's only used the Tip Trap, which the mice walked around but not into, as well as the Havahart, which again, the mice simply avoided. Ms. Green plans on buying this for her husband for Christmas and will report back on its efficacy.

Of course, the trick is that if you actually manage to catch the mice you take them far, far away from your house or they will return, chewing through packets of fig cookies with abandon. So be sure to drive them somewhere distant. Like to the beach. Or to Tennessee.

Ms. Green is the combined effort of Adrienne and Mark Bashista, co-owners of Home Performance NC, an energy auditing, energy rating, and home weatherization contracting company. They can be reached on the web: www.homeperformancenc.com and by phone: 919.360.1570

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