

City of Santa Barbara Water Conservation Program How to Check for Leaks on Your Property

First, check for leaks

1. During a time when it is convenient to not use any water on your property (communicate to everyone on the property that they should not use water for the set period of time, recommend 1-2 hours), go out to your meter with a marking pen and a screwdriver. If you don't know where your meter is, please call us and we will assist you in finding it. It is typically in a grey plastic or cement rectangular box flush to the ground with a small hole in the top of the box, normally located close to the street and/ or sidewalk. The number of the meter should match the meter number on your water bill.
2. Once you have located the meter, open the meter box by inserting the screwdriver in the hole on the top of the meter and lift off the cover. Inside will be the meter, lift up the lid covering the face of the meter. On the face of the meter you will see a red needle similar to the hand of a clock. The needle moves clockwise as water flows through the meter. Check to see whether the needle is moving or still. Important, make sure no one is using water! If it is moving, you have a leak.
3. If it is not moving, take the marking pen and mark the location of the needle on the face of the meter. Come back after at least one hour and check to see if the needle has moved past the pen mark. If it has, you have a leak (probably a slow one because if it was a more substantial leak, you would see the needle moving right away.) If the needle did not move, you probably do not have any leaks. If you have had higher than normal water use, you might have an intermittent leak which would not necessarily show up on your first test. If you suspect an intermittent leak, try a longer test, such as overnight, and check your toilets carefully for possible problems. You may want to do this check periodically or if you ever have a suspicion that you may have a leak.

Locating the leak

1. First check the obvious place, the toilets. Remove the toilet tank cover. Check for flowing water, listen closely for gurgling or hissing noises, and check if the water level is up to the overflow tube or above the indicated water level line. If the water level is too high, lower it by squeezing the "C" clip and moving it down the valve rod on a Fluidmaster valve or by tightening the screw at the joint of the ballcock valve. If this adjustment does not lower the water level, the refill valve will have to be repaired or replaced.

Place a few drops of food coloring in the tank. Wait ten minutes. Check the bowl of the toilet. If the water in the bowl has turned the color of the food coloring, the flapper seal is leaking. When you purchase a new flapper seal, make sure it is the correct model for your style toilet. This is very important because if it is not the correct style, it may still leak.

2. If you have a water softener, check to make sure it is not malfunctioning. Check the salt reservoir. Increased salt use correlates to increased water usage and may indicate a change in the regeneration schedule or malfunction.
3. If you have an irrigation system, check all valve boxes. Make sure your sprinkler timer is set properly and not over irrigating, malfunctioning, or on "default." For information to help you set an appropriate irrigation schedule, see the links below or contact us for an irrigation evaluation.
4. Check your pressure regulator where the water line comes into the house. Listen for the sound of running water.

The following websites have good information on checking inside and outside for leaks and efficiency:

www.SaveWaterSB.org www.sbwater.org www.h2ouse.org

If you would like to track your water usage to make sure your usage is normal before receiving your next water bill, we suggest reading your meter at regular convenient intervals.