

Why Trust Anyone Else?

Does your shutoff shut off?

Don't wait for a disaster to find out

Your main shutoff valve is one of the most important disaster-stoppers in your home. When a pipe leaks or bursts, this valve lets you shut off water flow to your entire home. But there's a good chance your main valve will fail when you need it. So take a few minutes now to make sure you can close it.

Ball valves rarely fail, and testing is easy. But if you have a gate valve, you might need a little patience and know-how. Turn the handle clockwise to close it. If you can't turn the handle, loosen the packing nut just a little (photo 1). A shot of lubricant or penetrating oil may also help. Then try again. Don't worry about cranking too hard. There's a small chance that you'll damage the valve, but a valve that won't close is useless anyway and needs to be replaced. For help with that project, call a plumber, or utilize Honest Home Inspections; Trusted Resource List.

Reopening a stubborn gate valve is more risky than closing it; you're more likely to break internal parts and could end up without running water. If the valve is stuck closed, tap it with a hammer (photo 2). When the valve opens a little, stop for a few minutes. That allows water pressure on both sides of the valve to equalize, instead of pressing against one side and locking the valve in place.



EMERGENCY SHUTOFF TIPS

- If a toilet or faucet is leaking, try the shutoff valves below them first. If they won't close, head for the main valve.
- If you're able to close your main valve most of the way but it's still allowing a trickle of water through, simply open the lowest faucet in your house. Water will trickle out of that facet, but it won't flow to the higher pipes in the house.
- If your home has a water meter, you have two valves – one on each side of the meter. If one won't close, try the other. Closing either of them will stop the flow.
- If you have a hot water leak, you can stop the flow by turning off the valve at the water heater.