

Home Buyers Guide to Plumbing



Introduction

A home's plumbing system is one of the most important components of your new home, it can also be one of the most expensive to repair. Many homebuyers purchase their homes with a basic Building and Pest inspection assuming the plumbing is inspected. In most cases plumbing is not adequately covered in a Building and Pest inspection, and it shouldn't be. To determine whether a home's plumbing system is up to scratch an experienced plumber is required to inspect the home's plumbing. A Building or Pest Inspector just doesn't have the knowledge or experience to discover any serious or underlying plumbing problems.

The biggest problem potential homeowners face is sewer and stormwater drainage issues, these include broken, collapsed or cracked pipes and tree root infiltrated pipelines which can cost into the thousands of dollars to repair. During our experience we have found 9/10 Australian homes have moderate to major plumbing problems. The most important component of buying a new home is knowing exactly what you are buying by identifying any underlying problems before you purchase your home. In this guide you'll discover the warning signs, understand potential problems and what to look for.

Hot Water Systems

Issues with hot water systems are usually the worst next to blocked drains, there's nothing worse than getting home from work and jumping into the shower to wonder why there's no hot water.

The most common hot water unit is the Electric Hot Water Unit, they are the most affordable units and usually last 10-15 years outdoors and 15-20 years indoors.



The main problems with units younger than 10 years are the element and thermostat failing or shorting out, in these cases you'll need to replace either or both of them, this is the #1 reason for no hot water.

Older Hot Water Units tend to start degrading, rusting and falling apart until one of their components fails and starts to leak, if the copper pipe or one of the valves are leaking you can usually replace or repair it however if the Hot Water Unit itself is leaking it usually means the internal cylinder has ruptured and is not worth repairing.

Water Leaks

The most common water leaks include toilet cisterns, taps and underground water pipes.

Toilet leaks can occasionally be difficult to detect, throw a piece of toilet paper against the back of the toilet bowl come back in a few minutes and if the paper is saturated or slid into the bowl because it's too wet you have an outlet leak. Next is the cistern shut off valve which degrades and leaks over time followed by the water inlet pipe and valve these will also degrade over time and a plumber is usually required to replace or repair these parts.



Leaking taps are always best done by a professional, they tend to be done properly and last much longer than the average DIY job. A plumber has the right grease and re-seating tools to make the tap like new.

Undetected water leaks are most often undetected entirely until you receive a letter from the Council or your next water bill. Over time pipes and fitting degrade leading to underground water leaks. Also pipes tend to move slightly when taps are turned off and on if the ground is rocky the pipe wears a hole over the rocks and begins to leak.

In these cases you can do a meter test:

***Note: Do not use any water during the test.**

1. Locate your water meter, usually out the front of the property and is covered by a metal or plastic cover. In some unit complexes there are shared water meters, turning this off will turn off the entire unit block so check with your property manager or neighbours first.
2. Write down the numbers on the water meter.
3. After 30-60 minutes return to the water meter and write down the numbers.
4. If the numbers have not changed you don't have a pressurised leak. If the numbers have changed continue with the following steps.
5. Turn off all taps and valves including to the dishwasher, toilets, fridge and washing machine.
6. Repeat steps 1-3 if the numbers have not changed, you have an internal water leak from toilets, fridges, washing machines or taps. If the numbers have changed you most likely have a water leak from an underground or internal pipe, at this stage you need to call a leak detector.

Sewer and Stormwater Drainage

Over 90% of homes we inspect we find either cracked, broken, collapsed or tree root infiltrated pipes. This issues can cause undermining (if you've ever seen a sinkhole on TV this is what usually causes them) which can shift foundations causing structural damage and costing tens of thousands of dollars in repairs! Tree roots are a common cause of blocked drains, as trees search for water with their roots they find small crevices or cracks in sewer or stormwater pipes.



These roots soak up the water and slowing grow into the pipe, they eventually crush the pipe or fill it to a point where water or waste cannot pass. Once the water or waste back up the pipes discharge to the closest point. If your plumbing is up to Australian standards this will be an overflow gully just outside your house, in some cases homes without the overflow gully have discharged inside the house, showers and floor wastes causing terrible damage.

An experienced and licensed plumber will have a CCTV Drain Camera during their inspection. The Drain Camera is inserted into an inspection opening or I/O. The plumber can see through the head of the camera on a small screen, visually inspecting every inch of the pipe. This is the most effective solution to locating damage or tree roots in pipes. Most plumbers can even record their findings to DVD for a small fee.

Water Efficiency

If you're planning on renting your new home out and charging tenants for water, it's required by the RTA to perform a Water Efficiency Test and receive a Water Efficiency Certificate from a licensed plumber. A plumber will test each fixture and fitting for the flow rate to meet the standard requirements.

- Shower heads – maximum flow rate of 9 litres per minute.
- Toilets must be a dual flush no greater than 6.5 litres full flush and 3.5 litres half flush and a maximum average flush volume of 4 litres (based on the average 1 full flush 4 half flush).
- Internal cold water taps and mixer taps excluding bath taps and taps for appliances such as your fridge, dishwasher or washing machine require a maximum flow rate of 9 litres per minute.

Pre Purchase Plumbing Inspections

Jetset Plumbing provide a full comprehensive Pre-Purchase Plumbing Inspection Report tailored to your new home, on average they are 15 pages and can include a DVD recording of your sewer and stormwater lines if requested.

We can coordinate with the existing owners or Real Estate agent to arrange a time for inspection on your behalf, generally the full turnaround time is between 24-48 hours.

Within the report is a detailed assessment of each fitting, fixture, hot water unit, sewer and stormwater line, bathroom, kitchen, laundry, roof guttering and downpipes.

If you would like one of our Gold Coast or [Brisbane Plumbers](#) to perform a Pre Purchase Plumbing Inspection please call Jetset Plumbing on 1300 453 873 or visit our website for [more information](#).