



## SLAB LEAKS

The term “slab leak” has become extremely popular over the past decade or two. Unfortunately the terminology has become popular as the rate of water pipe failure under the slab of homes has steadily increased.

Since the 1980's, most Southern California homes have been constructed on a concrete slab. The design of these homes have run copper pipe under the concrete to various locations within the home. The pipes then penetrate the slab and run within the walls to the fixtures they serve.

There are several contributing factors that create leaks in the pipes under the slab. The most common factors are:

- ▶ **DEFECTIVE OR SUBSTANDARD MATERIALS:** Thin walled (type L) copper does not hold up nearly as well as thicker walled (type M). Also pipe that was not properly cared for during the construction process may have kinks or other imperfections that lead to future leaks.
- ▶ **FAULTY INSTALLATION:** Lack of protective coating installation, improperly installed joints, pipes ran across metal and kinked bends may lead to future slab leaks.
- ▶ **ACIDIC SOIL:** The content of the soil may more aggressively corrode the pipes.
- ▶ **WATER QUALITY:** Like acidic soil, water contents can cause the water in the pipes to be more corrosive or more aggressively degrade the pipes.
- ▶ **GROUND MOVEMENT:** Ground settling and earthquakes can cause the ground to move and expose pipes to damaging elements under the slab of the home.
- ▶ **WATER PRESSURE:** Plumbing systems are designed to function at what is considered normal water pressure. Increased water pressure can directly contribute to leaks and premature failure of the entire plumbing system. Extreme water pressure can be very harmful to the pipes and fixtures.

There are both subtle and not so subtle indicators that you may have a slab leak. Subtle indicators could be if you hear water flowing even when all the fixtures are off or you notice increased water bills, you could have a slab leak. More obvious indicators could be a warm spot in the floor, wet carpet or a damp spot near your exterior foundation.

If you suspect that you may have a slab leak, turn off all the fixtures within the house. Go out to your water meter and pull off the lid. Watch the meter for a few minutes. If you see the meter turn, you have a leak.

Now that you have determined you may have a leak, you should call a professional for further evaluation.

Electronic leak detection is the best tool to verify and locate the leak. A skilled professional will be able to pin point the exact location of the leak and determine the best course of action.

There are a few different remedies to solve a slab leak.

▶ **SPOT REPAIR:** A professional will pull the floor covering away from the area and break a hole in the concrete slab to excavate the soil and access the damaged line. Once exposed the damaged section of pipe will be removed and replaced with a new piece of pipe. This method is very intrusive to the home and its residents and may leave you open for future leaks if the line is compromised in other locations.

▶ **RE-ROUTE:** Holes will be cut in the walls to allow a path for a new line to be run to the fixtures that are served by the leaking pipe. New pipe will be run in the walls and/or ceiling and the leaking pipe will be capped off. This can also be intrusive; however it eliminates the possibility of future slab leaks in the line.

▶ **MULTIPLE RE-ROUTES:** If you are re-routing a hot water line due to a slab leak, it often makes sense to re-route the accompanying cold water line (and vice-versa) to prevent both lines from future slab leaks.

▶ **RE-PIPE:** Removing all lines possible from under the slab of the home by re-piping the home may make sense if you already have the work taking place in the home. With a re-pipe you will never have to deal with a slab leak again.

Regular inspections of your plumbing system can help reduce the possibility of experiencing a slab leak. A knowledgeable professional will evaluate your system and provide you with feedback on the positive elements and recommendations on the negative elements. ⚙

*This article was written and submitted by  
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