

## Turning Off Your Water - Bob Mattsson

Lynn Buechler was away for three weeks and when she returned a friend noticed one of her toilets was running. Lynn didn't think much of it at the time but when she got her water bill for \$800 she realized there was a lot of water going down the toilet over that period of time. That's called throwing money down the toilet. It is important to fix all leaks as even small ones can add up to a lot over time. Another resident had their ice maker water line



**Typical Ball Valve**

break behind the refrigerator while they were away for a few days and it flooded and damaged the area. We must also remember the homes are at, or near 10 years old and these hoses and fittings as well as the ones connected to your washing machine are getting old. (So am I) There are water alarms out there (<http://www.thewateralarm.com/>) that detect a

leaking hose or hot water heater and sound an alarm or even shut the water off.

So, turn off the water when you leave your house for more than a few days. There are three valves where the water enters the house. They are all quarter turn ball valves that are very easy to operate if they are accessible. One is the Main Valve, this turns off all water to the house and sprinkler system and is installed inline before the other two.

One of the others is a House Valve, this turns off the water to everything in the house including your outside hose



**Typical ball valve arrangement, all in the closed position.**

spigots. The third valve is the Irrigation or sprinkler valve and this controls the water to your sprinkler system unless you have a well and pump. So if you go away in the summer and want to keep your sprinklers going, just turn off the House

valve and the sprinklers will get their water. Leaving for an extended period in the winter? Tell your neighbors so they can watch your house. Set your thermostat at about 55 to 58 degrees. There are alarm units out there from \$25 to many hundreds that will flash a light or a horn or even call a telephone number you have pre-selected when the temperature in the house goes below 40 or 45 degrees. The device will keep calling every 15 minutes until

answered. Do a Google search for 'temperature alarms'. If you use the one that turns on a light to warn a neighbor make sure it has at least two bulbs in case one blows out. Leave the cabinet doors under sinks on outside walls open to allow heat in; especially on the north side (If you face the direction the sun comes up in the morning and raise your left arm it will point north). Set your hot water heater to the vacation or pilot setting. This will prevent condensation and rust in the heat chamber. Shut off humidifier water if you are going away for an extended period. Loosen the tubing connection after the valve under your sink or atop your hot water heater and allow the line to drain. If you do not drain the line it could still freeze and crack causing a problem when you return and turn it back on. When you have your heat set to around 70 degrees some of the heat escapes to the attic through the ceiling but if it is set to 55 there is not much of a variance and the attic will be very cold on windy days when the outside temperature gets really low. If your hot water heater is in the garage leave it on the pilot setting and make sure there are no drafts, particularly in or around garage doors. Pull the plug on the garage door opener and wedge the door fully closed if it doesn't seal well. The temperature difference between the garage and house is about 20 degrees with the heat on normal and more when set to 55. That could allow the garage to get down to 30 degrees and possibly lower in severe weather. This would freeze any water pipes in your garage. If you turn off your water you should never leave your hot water heater on any position other than 'Pilot'.

If you have hot water heat (baseboard heat), do not turn off your main water supply. If you have a slight leak somewhere and the furnace cannot make up the water automatically, a sensor will detect low water and shut down the system. If the heat doesn't come on everything will freeze and burst if it gets cold enough.