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askthisoldhouse

Q WATER-HEATER-LEAK PROTECTION

My water heater sits on the same concrete slab as the rest of the house. I'm worried that the tank will do considerable damage if it ever leaks. Should I put a pan under it?

—DONALD PAEK, FORT WORTH, TEXAS

Richard Trethewey replies: Yes. The International Residential Code (IRC) actually requires a pan in locations where a tank leak could cause damage. To prevent overflows, the code specifies that a pan should be 1½ inches deep and connected to a ¾-inch drainpipe that leads to the outside. A pan will also collect water expelled by the pressure-relief valve, should it ever activate.

Retrofitting a drainpipe in your concrete slab won't be easy, but you might be able to run it, without any pitch, on top of the slab to an exterior wall.

Because water heaters have a habit of springing leaks when you're not around, consider installing a moisture-activated shutoff valve, like those made by Flood-Master (floodmaster.com). The valve mounts on the heater's water-supply line and has a moisture sensor in the pan. When the sensor detects a leak, the valve automatically shuts down the water-supply line, preventing a leak from becoming a gusher. It's one of the great inventions of the plumbing world.



FM-094
Water Heater
Leak Detection
and Automatic
Feed Water
Shut-Off
System

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