HOME
REPAIR
RESOURCE
CENTER

for do-self repairs

EMERGENCY SHUT-OFFS

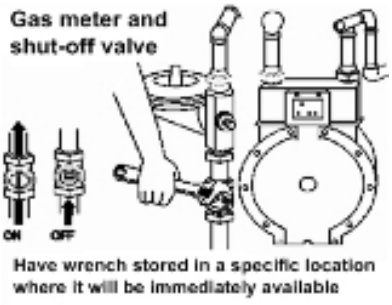
If you suddenly had to turn off the gas, water, or electrical power to your house, would you know how to do it? It's important that every adult and teenager in your home know where the emergency shut offs are and how to operate them.

GAS

The supplier adds a distinctive smell to the natural gas sent to your house, so you can tell if gas is leaking from a gas line or fitting. Since the gas is explosive, *if you detect the odor of natural gas, immediately turn off the gas supply to your house and call the emergency phone number for the gas company.* They will check for any leaks and let you know what repair work is needed.

The valve that shuts off all the gas to your home is usually found at the meter, typically located on an exterior wall near the street. (In addition to measuring how much gas your household uses each month, the meter joins the incoming gas line to the individual gas supply pipes that run to your appliances.) To turn off gas to the whole house, find the shut-off valve on the gas pipe on the utility side of the meter. When gas is flowing, the lug on the valve will be in line with the pipe. Use an adjustable or open-end wrench to turn the lug perpendicular to (across) the pipe. Some gas will remain in the line (and should be bled before starting repair work), but with the valve closed, no more gas will flow into the house.

Sometimes it's necessary to shut off the gas to an individual appliance, as when you change your water heater. In that case, locate the appliance gas shut-off valve and turn the handle 90°, so it is perpendicular to the gas line.



main gas shut-off

appliance gas shut-off

WATER

Water lines are typically controlled by several valves, and most people will turn off the one that is least disruptive to water supplied to the rest of the house. If you are lucky, you can find a shut-off valve that controls the water supply to the individual fixture that is leaking – sink faucet, toilet, dishwasher, washing machine, etc. Sometimes, that valve will be on the supply

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line to the fixture; one or more clockwise turns will usually stop the water. If you don't find a shut off at the fixture, check in the basement for a "zone valve" that controls water flow to that area of the house (bathroom, kitchen, etc.)

shut-off at fixture

zone shut-off valve

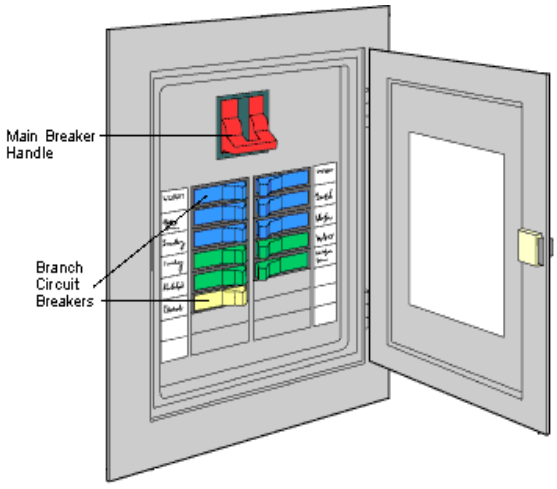
If you can't shut off the water with a zone valve, you'll need to shut off all the water to the house. Locate the main water shut-off valve, usually where the water line from the street comes into the house. (If you have an interior meter, you may have two valves, one on the street side of the meter and one on the house side of the meter.) The valve may be operated with a lever, or a with round handle that you'll have to turn clockwise – often several rotations – to shut off the water flow completely.

Main Water Shut-off valve

Failing this, the water can be turned off at the street, but most homeowners won't have the necessary tools to do so. The valve at the water main is several feet underground, usually near the sidewalk or driveway apron. Representatives from the water department (and many plumbers) have a water meter wrench, shaped like a "T", that fits over a lug on the valve to turn the water on and off.

ELECTRICITY

To shut off the electrical power, you'll need to find the main service panel, usually on an exterior wall near where the electric meter is located on the outside of the house. (Some houses may have additional "subpanels" that route electrical service to other areas where it's needed.) At the main service panel, large wires coming from the meter enter the box, and the available current is divided among several circuits controlled by fuses or circuit breakers.



Depending on how your house is wired, you'll usually find a breaker or fuse block in the main service that will control all the electricity entering your house; tripping the breaker or pulling out the cartridge fuses will shut off all the power.

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If you want to shut off power to just one circuit, you'll need to locate the fuse or breaker that controls that circuit and remove that fuse or trip that breaker. An electrical map of your house can be helpful when you need to locate that controlling fuse or breaker in a hurry. *(See separate handout on making an electrical map of your house.)*

CONCLUSION

In an emergency, don't waste time trying to limit the service you shut off. Just go to the main shut off – gas, water, or electrical – and stop the flow before more damage occurs. Once you've taken that step, you'll have time to determine if there are less restrictive measures that will accomplish what you need to do.