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Got Gas?

By Lou Fancher



Maurice Williams Photo Andy Scheck

Because of that, Leapfrog and other companies will come to a home to provide a whole house inspection. "There's no charge," William says. "We recently put it in our ads and we've only had two calls. Maybe because a lot of people don't think gas lines are a part of plumbing, but we check those lines too."

For people who don't have or can't find their shut-off keys, he recommends contacting a plumbing hardware store to get one.

New construction requirements are tight, so proper valves on new homes are less of a concern. There's a seismic valve at the meter, but not excess flow valves at each appliance.

The San Bruno tragedy has made gas customers anxious. "We're vendors for PG&E, so they phoned us when that event occurred," Williams says. "This was the first time we've been on site at a catastrophic situation. They escorted us into the neighborhood and we replaced water heaters, gas flex lines and water lines."

The situation in San Bruno was rare, according to Williams. He thinks PG&E will have to work hard to regain the public's trust. He points out that the gas lines that exploded in San Bruno were large, 300-600 psi pressure pipes. Typical pipes approaching a home are low, 2-5 psi pressure pipes. He says there are few fatalities or injuries when construction workers accidentally breach these lines, such as during the late night incident in Orinda on September 22nd when construction equipment hit a small pipe.

For William's part, educating homeowners is a priority; knowing what gas appliances are in your home and how to control the flow of gas is a must. New construction or renovation projects should be done with licensed companies and permits. Williams has seen homes where someone has built around or even directly over a meter, placing the shut-off valves completely out reach. Having and knowing how to use your emergency gas meter key is essential.

What does Williams advise if you do smell gas in your home?

- Get out of the area immediately.
- Do not light a cigarette or other ignition system.
- If a pilot light is on, leave it. Turning it off could cause a spark to ignite the gas.
- Dial 911.

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If you could make your home and family less at risk from accidents involving gas leaks, would you do it?

Sure, you say, but that's impossible! I don't have the patience for a class action lawsuit or to wait for a new city council member to tell us exactly what lurks under Lamorinda's aging underground structures.

Lafayette's Maurice Williams, owner and operator of Leapfrog Plumbing since 1993, says you don't have to wait. "You can be pre-emptive: know how to shut off appliances or the gas main," he says, making it sound easy.

And it is.

Williams says homeowners and renters should ask themselves, What gas appliances do I have? Water heater, stove, dryer, and fireplace are the most common answers.

"For each, you can learn where the shut-off valves are located," he says. "And make sure each has an operable valve. Test it and make sure you can adjust it."

William also recommends checking your tools, especially an emergency shut-off key to your gas meter. He's still amazed at how many homeowners don't know where, or even what, it is.



Gas meter with seismic valve

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