CALGARY PLUMBING PRO

Fixtures, Toilets & Faucets

Replacing toilets, faucets, sinks, tubs and showers, shut-off valves, dishwasher and fridge water lines in Calgary homes

4 Expert Answers from Plumbing IQ

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Q1

How do I shut off water to a single toilet in Calgary?

The shut-off valve for a toilet is almost always right there at the wall or floor behind the toilet, on the supply line running from the wall or floor up to the tank. It looks like a small oval or football-shaped handle, or sometimes a flat-head slot. Turn it clockwise until it stops, then flush the toilet once to empty the tank. That is the whole job.

If the handle turns but water keeps running, the valve has failed and needs replacing. If there is no individual shut-off at all, you will need to use the main house shut-off instead, which is typically near the water meter in the mechanical room or utility area.

Finding the main shut-off matters before you need it. Locate it now, turn it a quarter-turn to confirm it moves freely, and make sure everyone in the house knows where it is. A stuck main shut-off is a problem you want to discover on a calm afternoon, not during a leak.

What to do if the valve needs replacing

Replacing a toilet shut-off valve is straightforward plumbing work. Under Alberta's Permit Regulation, replacing a valve when the piping itself does not change does not require a permit. A homeowner in Calgary who owns and lives in the home can do this work themselves without a permit, provided the supply piping is not being altered.

If you are comfortable turning off the main, draining the line and swapping the valve, it is a reasonable DIY task. The parts are inexpensive at any hardware store. If the supply line is old braided steel or corroded, replace it at the same time.

If you would rather have a plumber handle it, the work typically falls within a service call: expect a call-out fee in the range of $50 to $150, plus labour at roughly $85 to $150 an hour during regular hours. The valve and supply line are a minor parts cost on top of that.

A few things worth checking while you are back there: confirm the supply line is not kinked or showing mineral buildup at the fittings (Calgary's water is hard, with calcium and magnesium levels that can scale up connections over time), and make sure the toilet has a functioning shut-off at all before any repair work starts on the tank or fill valve.

Keep the receipt for any parts you buy and note the date the valve was replaced. That record is worth having if you ever sell the home or need to show a plumber what was done.

Q2

Toilet flushing weakly in an older Calgary bungalow, why?

A weak flush in an older Calgary bungalow usually comes down to one of a handful of causes, and most of them are inexpensive to sort out. A plumber's diagnostic visit typically runs $85 to $150 an hour plus a call-out fee of $50 to $150, and many of the likely fixes are small jobs.

What a plumber will check first

One possibility is mineral scale: Calgary's water is hard (the City reports roughly 141 to 274 mg/L depending on the treatment plant), and scale can build up inside the small rim jets around the underside of the toilet bowl and inside the siphon jet at the base. When those holes partially block, the flush loses its force. A plumber can clear them with a descaling treatment; in a severe case the toilet is simply past its useful life.

Beyond scale, the fill valve inside the tank may be worn and not refilling the tank to the correct water level. If the water sits well below the fill line marked in the tank, the flush won't have enough volume behind it. A fill-valve replacement is a small job billed at the plumber's rate plus the part. The flapper is worth checking too: if it drops too quickly, water escapes the tank before the bowl gets a full charge.

In an older bungalow the drain line itself is worth considering. Partial blockages from years of buildup, or a slow-draining main line, can make a toilet appear to flush weakly when the real problem is downstream. A camera inspection ($200 to $600) shows the condition of the drain without any guesswork, and it's worth doing if the toilet has been sluggish for a while or if other drains in the house are slow.

The toilet itself may simply be near the end of its useful life, which a plumber can tell you once the other causes are ruled out.

No permit is needed to replace a fill valve, flapper or the toilet itself when the rough-in piping stays untouched. That falls under the Alberta Permit Regulation's exemption for fixture and valve changes that don't alter the piping. If a plumber finds the drain needs clearing or a section of drain pipe needs repair, a plumbing permit from the City of Calgary would come into play.

A homeowner in Calgary who owns and lives in the home can take out a plumbing permit for any plumbing work they do themselves, should it come to that.

Before calling anyone, check whether the shut-off valve behind or below the toilet is fully open (turn it counterclockwise as far as it goes), lift the tank lid and confirm the water level sits close to the marked line or the top of the overflow tube, and look under the rim with a flashlight for obvious mineral buildup. Those three checks take two minutes and often point straight at the answer.

Q3

My toilet rocks on the floor in my Calgary bathroom, what now?

A rocking toilet in Calgary is usually a straightforward fix, but it is worth taking seriously because what looks like a wobbly seat can quietly become a water damage and subfloor problem. Labour to reseat a toilet typically runs **$150 to $400**, depending on what the plumber finds once the toilet comes off.

Why it rocks and what the plumber checks

The most common possibilities are a worn or compressed wax ring, loose or corroded closet bolts, a cracked toilet base, or a floor flange that has shifted, corroded or sits too low after a tile or flooring job. A plumber will check the flange condition carefully before deciding whether to reseat or replace it.

If the subfloor under the toilet has been damp for a while, it may be soft or rotted, and that changes the scope and the price. A plumber will press on the floor around the base and look for give. Subfloor repair is a separate cost and a separate trade if the damage is significant.

Do not keep using a rocking toilet. Every flush flexes the wax ring seal, and a broken seal lets sewer gas and, eventually, water into the floor cavity.

Permit and who should do the work

Replacing a wax ring and reseating the toilet on an existing flange, with no change to the drain piping, falls under the Alberta Permit Regulation's exemption for replacing a fixture when the piping does not change. No plumbing permit is needed for that scope. If the flange itself needs to be cut out and replaced, that is an alteration to the drain, and the City of Calgary would require a plumbing permit. A homeowner who owns and lives in the home may apply for that permit and do the work themselves; a contractor takes out the permit in their own name if they are doing the job.

The plumber doing this work must be a certified journeyperson or a registered apprentice working under one. That is a compulsory trade requirement under Alberta's Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act.

What a fair quote covers

Ask for a written price that spells out: whether the toilet comes off and goes back on or is being replaced, the flange inspection and any repair scope, the new wax ring and hardware, removal of the old materials, and whether subfloor assessment is included or billed separately if damage is found. Get the warranty on parts and labour in writing.

Before signing, ask to see the plumber's trade certificate and a WCB-Alberta clearance letter. If any deposit changes hands before the work is complete, the contractor needs an Alberta prepaid contracting licence from Service Alberta.

One question settles most surprises on this job: if the flange or subfloor turns out to need repair, what is the revised scope and price, and will you get that in writing before they proceed?

Q4

Adding a bidet seat to my Calgary toilet, a DIY job?

For most bidet seats, yes, this is a reasonable DIY job for a Calgary homeowner, and no plumbing permit is needed.

A bidet seat replaces your existing toilet seat and connects to the cold water supply at the fill valve, using the shut-off valve already behind the toilet. The Alberta Permit Regulation exempts replacing a valve or fixture when the piping itself does not change, so a standard bidet seat installation falls outside the permit requirement entirely. You are not altering the drain, moving supply lines or opening walls.

Check that the seat you buy has backflow protection built in. Anything connected to your drinking water supply should not be able to let water flow back into it, and if you are unsure whether a particular seat is suitable, a plumber can confirm it before you install.

What the job actually involves

You shut off the water at the toilet's supply valve, flush to empty the tank, disconnect the supply line from the fill valve, and install a T-fitting (included with most seats) that splits the supply between the tank and the seat. The seat itself clips onto the bowl in place of the old seat. The whole thing typically takes under an hour with basic tools. An electrical bidet seat (heated water, dryer, warm seat) also needs a grounded outlet within reach; if there is no outlet near the toilet, that part is an electrician's job, not a plumber's.

Calgary's hard water is worth keeping in mind. Hardness at the Bearspaw and Glenmore plants ranges from roughly 141 to 274 mg/L depending on the season, and scale can build up in the bidet's internal nozzles and filters over time. Rinsing or descaling the seat periodically will keep it working properly.

A plumber is not needed here unless the shut-off valve behind the toilet is seized, corroded or leaking when you turn it. In that case, replacing the valve is straightforward work but does require shutting off the water to the house, and at that point a plumber is the sensible call. The Alberta Permit Regulation still exempts a valve replacement when the piping does not change, so no permit would be needed even then.

If you do call a plumber for the valve, expect a service call fee in the range of $50 to $150 plus labour at roughly $85 to $150 an hour during regular hours.

When comparing any quotes for that valve work, ask whether the call-out fee is included in the hourly rate or charged on top of it, because that gap is where the final bill most often surprises people.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Calgary Plumbing Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority (the City of Calgary or your own

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