CALGARY PLUMBING PRO

Poly-B & Repiping

Polybutylene (Poly-B) and older piping, insurance questions, whole-house repiping with PEX or copper, and what repiping involves

4 Expert Answers from Plumbing IQ

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Q1

How much drywall gets opened for a Poly-B repipe in Calgary?

Whole-house Poly-B replacement in Calgary typically means opening drywall in dozens of spots, and how much depends almost entirely on how the house was built and how the plumber runs the new pipe.

What actually drives the wall opening

Supply lines run through wall cavities, across floor joists and up through interior partitions. A plumber replacing Poly-B has two broad approaches. The first is fishing new PEX through existing cavities with minimal cuts, which works well in open-concept homes or where the pipe routing is straightforward. The second is cutting access holes wherever a fitting, a tee or a change of direction sits, which can mean many individual openings in a two-storey home. Many jobs mix the two approaches.

The factors that push toward more opening are: multiple bathrooms on different floors, a finished basement with drywalled ceilings, pipe that runs horizontally across studs rather than vertically through them, and older homes where the framing leaves little room to fish. Homes with a crawl space or an unfinished basement ceiling give the plumber easier access to the lower runs, which reduces cutting upstairs.

The typical Calgary whole-house repipe runs $8,000 to $15,000, with most homes landing around $10,000 to $13,000 and larger two-storey homes reaching about $18,000. Drywall patching and painting are often quoted separately, and that is where the real variation hides: a job with 40 small patches and a job with 10 large ones cost very different amounts to make good.

A permit is required. The City of Calgary issues plumbing permits for this work. A homeowner who owns and lives in the home may apply for the plumbing permit if they do the work themselves; when you hire a plumber, the plumber takes it out, because whoever does the work holds the permit. Rough-in and final inspections follow.

What a fair quote for this job includes

Ask for the quote to spell out: the pipe material and fittings being used, which fixtures and branches are included, how access holes will be made and by whom, whether drywall patching and painting are in scope or excluded, removal and disposal of the old Poly-B, the permit and both inspections, and the warranty on parts and labour. Before signing, ask to see the plumber's trade certificate and a WCB-Alberta clearance letter, and check whether a deposit triggers the need for an Alberta prepaid contracting licence from Service Alberta.

Watch for a quote that says "drywall repair by others" or simply leaves patching unmentioned; get a clear written answer on who patches, to what standard, and at what price before the first hole is cut.

Q2

Poly-B under the kitchen sink only in my Calgary house?

A short section of Poly-B under the kitchen sink is a very different situation from whole-house piping, and it does not automatically mean a full repipe. Replacing just those few feet of supply line is a small job, usually billed at the plumber's rate of about $85 to $150 an hour plus a call-out fee, depending on how the cabinet is configured and what fittings are involved.

What actually matters with a small Poly-B run

Poly-B is not illegal, and the Province of Alberta is clear that existing installations are not required to be replaced. The concern with Poly-B tends to centre on the fittings and on age: Alberta's fact sheet notes that most installations here used copper or brass insert fittings, which have a better track record than the plastic fittings reported to cause more problems elsewhere. If the short run under your sink uses brass or copper compression fittings and shows no discolouration, cracking or weeping at the joints, a plumber may tell you it is fine to leave alone for now.

That said, under a kitchen sink is one of the easier places to swap pipe, because everything is accessible without opening walls. If a plumber is already there for another reason, or if the fittings look worn, replacing that short section with PEX or copper while the cabinet is open is a reasonable call.

Check with your home insurer. Some insurers ask about Poly-B; what they do with that information varies by policy and company, so a call to your insurer is worth making before you decide whether to replace it.

On permits: Alberta's Permit Regulation does not require a permit to change a faucet, trap or valve when the piping itself does not change; replacing a section of supply pipe is closer to altering the piping, so ask the plumber or the City of Calgary whether your scope needs one. If the plumber needs to go further into the wall or change the shut-off valve location, the scope changes and so might the permit requirement. Ask the plumber to confirm before work starts.

A homeowner in Calgary who owns and lives in the home may take out a plumbing permit for work that does need one. Gas is a separate matter and is not involved here.

What a fair quote should include: a fixed price or an hourly rate plus call-out fee, the pipe material and fitting type being used, confirmation of whether a permit is needed, and a warranty on both parts and labour in writing.

It helps to settle one thing up front: if the plumber opens the cabinet and find the Poly-B runs further than expected, what does the price become, and is that in the quote?

Q3

Which season suits a repipe in Calgary?

Repiping a Calgary home has no bad season, but each time of year brings practical trade-offs worth knowing before you book.

What actually drives the timing

The work happens almost entirely inside the house, so outdoor temperature matters far less than your own schedule and the contractor's availability. That said, a few seasonal patterns are worth considering.

Winter is when frozen pipes become the urgent reason many Calgary homeowners discover their Poly-B or older copper is failing. Emergency calls fill plumbers' schedules fast during a cold snap, so if you are reacting to a burst, expect after-hours rates of roughly $150 to $250 an hour on top of a call-out fee. If you are planning ahead rather than reacting to a leak, you can book on your own schedule.

Spring brings snowmelt and the first warm weeks, a natural time to deal with anything the winter exposed. Booking a few weeks out is wise. Spring is also a good time to have a plumber assess whether any pipes in exterior walls or unheated spaces took stress from the cold.

Summer can be busy for the trades, so you may wait longer for a start date. That said, the long days and dry conditions make any incidental exterior work, such as a new water service connection, straightforward.

Fall gives you time to complete the work and have it inspected before the deep cold arrives. If your home has Poly-B, finishing the repipe before winter removes the risk of a failure during a cold snap when crews are hardest to reach.

On cost and permits, a whole-house repipe in Calgary typically runs $8,000 to $15,000, with most homes landing between $10,000 and $13,000; a larger two-storey home can reach about $18,000. Drywall patching and painting are often quoted separately. The City of Calgary issues the plumbing permit for this work. A homeowner who owns and lives in the home may apply for the permit themselves if they do the work; when you hire a plumber, the plumber takes it out. Ask who will pull the permit before signing anything, and confirm the quote covers rough-in and final inspections, removal and disposal of the old pipe, and whether wall patching is included.

Before hiring, ask to see the plumber's trade certificate, check whether they hold an Alberta prepaid contracting licence if any deposit is required, and request a WCB-Alberta clearance letter confirming their account is in good standing.

Before anyone arrives, locate your main water shut-off inside the house and confirm it closes fully; that is the one thing you can check and test right now without any tools.

Q4

Should galvanized pipes in a Calgary infill be replaced now?

If the galvanized supply pipe in your Calgary home dates from the original build, it is likely near the end of its useful life, and replacing it before it fails is usually the smarter financial call. Galvanized supply pipe has a rough lifespan of 40 to 70 years, and the internal rust and mineral scale that accumulate over that time reduce water pressure, discolour the water and eventually cause pinhole leaks. Calgary's hard water, running between roughly 141 and 274 mg/L of calcium and magnesium depending on which treatment plant serves the address, adds to that scaling inside the pipe.

Is replacement urgent or optional?

The honest answer depends on what the pipe looks like right now. If the water runs rust-coloured in the morning, pressure at upper-floor fixtures is noticeably weak, or a plumber's camera or pressure test shows heavy internal buildup, replacement is urgent. If the pipe is still flowing cleanly and there are no visible corrosion stains at joints, you have some time, but not unlimited time. A renovation is the best window to act: when walls are already open, repiping costs less than opening finished drywall later.

A whole-house repipe in Calgary typically runs $8,000 to $15,000, with most homes landing around $10,000 to $13,000. A larger two-storey can reach about $18,000. Drywall patching and painting are sometimes quoted separately, so confirm that in writing before signing. PEX is a common replacement material because it is easier to route through tight spaces; copper remains an option where it suits the layout.

A City of Calgary plumbing permit is required for a repipe. When you hire a plumber, the plumber takes it out; a homeowner who owns and lives in the house can take out a homeowner permit only for work they do themselves. Starting work before the permit is issued doubles the permit fee, so confirm the permit is in hand before the first pipe is cut.

The plumber doing the work must be a certified journeyperson or a registered apprentice working under one. Under the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, plumbing is a compulsory certification trade in Alberta. Before paying any deposit, ask for the plumber's trade certificate, a WCB-Alberta clearance letter and, because a deposit is involved, confirmation that the contractor holds an Alberta prepaid contracting licence from Service Alberta. For a job this size, get the scope in writing: fixed price or hourly rate, which pipe material and fittings, permit and inspection, wall patching, removal and disposal of the old pipe, warranty on parts and labour, and start and completion dates.

One thing worth checking while the walls are open: if the home was built before 1987, there is a small chance lead solder was used at copper joints elsewhere in the system. The City of Calgary notes lead solder was permitted until

1986. A plumber can flag this during the repipe assessment.

Where the walls get opened is the question that tests a repipe quote: ask to be shown exactly where and how the patching will be handled, because that answer will tell you whether the quote is genuinely complete.

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