

OTTAWA PRO PLUMBING

General Plumbing

General plumbing questions and home plumbing systems

33 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

ottawaplumbingpro.ca/construction-brain

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Q1

What is the difference between hydro jetting and snaking a drain?

Hydro jetting uses high-pressure water to completely clean drain pipes, while snaking uses a mechanical cable to break through clogs. These are two different approaches to drain cleaning, each with specific advantages depending on your situation.

Snaking (also called augering) involves feeding a flexible metal cable with a cutting head into your drain to break up or retrieve blockages. The snake physically punches through clogs like hair, grease buildup, or small objects. It's effective for basic blockages and costs less, typically running \$150-\$300 in Ottawa. However, snaking only creates a hole through the blockage - it doesn't remove all the buildup clinging to your pipe walls.

Hydro jetting uses specialized equipment to blast water at pressures up to 4,000 PSI through your pipes, completely scouring the interior walls clean. This removes not just the immediate blockage, but also grease, soap scum, mineral deposits, and even tree roots that have infiltrated your lines. The process essentially restores your pipes to like-new condition. In Ottawa, hydro jetting typically costs \$350-\$600 but provides much longer-lasting results.

When to choose each method: Snaking works well for simple clogs in kitchen sinks, bathroom drains, or toilets. Hydro jetting is better for recurring blockages, slow-draining fixtures, or when you want preventive maintenance. It's particularly effective for main sewer lines and commercial applications where grease buildup is heavy.

Safety considerations: Both methods require proper equipment and technique. Hydro jetting especially needs professional handling - the high pressure can damage older pipes or create dangerous conditions if misused. A camera inspection often precedes hydro jetting to ensure your pipes can handle the pressure.

For recurring drain issues or preventive maintenance, hydro jetting provides better long-term value despite the higher upfront cost. Want to discuss which method suits your specific drain problem? Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers free consultations to help determine the best approach for your situation.

Q2

How often should I have my drains professionally cleaned?

Most residential drains should be professionally cleaned every 1-2 years as preventive maintenance, though this varies significantly based on your home's age, usage patterns, and existing plumbing conditions.

Kitchen drains typically need the most attention due to grease, food particles, and soap buildup. If you have a busy household or frequently cook with oils, annual cleaning helps prevent major blockages. **Bathroom drains** accumulate hair, soap scum, and personal care products, making them prime candidates for regular maintenance. **Floor drains** in basements or laundry rooms often go years without issues but should be checked during routine maintenance.

Signs you need professional drain cleaning sooner include slow drainage, gurgling sounds, recurring clogs despite DIY efforts, or unpleasant odors coming from drains. In Ottawa's older neighborhoods with mature trees, root intrusion into sewer lines can accelerate the need for professional cleaning - sometimes requiring annual attention for main sewer lines.

Homes with specific risk factors may need more frequent service. If you have a garbage disposal, older cast iron pipes, or large trees near your sewer line, annual professional cleaning is often worthwhile. Similarly, homes with multiple bathrooms or high water usage benefit from proactive maintenance rather than waiting for problems to develop.

Professional cleaning costs \$150-\$300 for basic drain clearing in Ottawa, which is far less expensive than dealing with emergency backups or water damage. Camera inspections during routine cleaning can also identify developing issues before they become major problems.

For a comprehensive drain assessment and to establish the right maintenance schedule for your specific home, request a consultation from Ottawa Pro Plumbing. We can evaluate your plumbing system and recommend a preventive maintenance plan that fits your needs and budget.

Q3

How much does a plumber charge to snake a main drain in Ottawa?

Main drain snaking in Ottawa typically costs between \$300-\$500, depending on the severity of the blockage and accessibility of your main sewer line.

The cost varies based on several factors specific to your situation. **Simple blockages near the cleanout** that clear quickly may be on the lower end, while **stubborn blockages deeper in the line** or those requiring multiple attempts can reach the higher range. If the plumber needs to access your main line through a floor drain or remove a toilet, expect additional labor charges of \$100-\$200.

Most Ottawa plumbing companies include the first hour of work in their service call fee, which covers basic snaking equipment. However, if your main drain requires **heavy-duty equipment like a power auger** or if tree

roots are suspected, the cost may increase. Some plumbers will recommend a **camera inspection (\$200-\$350) before snaking** to identify the exact problem and avoid unnecessary work.

Emergency calls outside business hours typically add \$50-\$100 to the base cost, and weekend service may carry additional premiums. Many Ottawa plumbers offer **flat-rate pricing for main drain clearing**, which can actually save you money compared to hourly rates if the blockage is particularly stubborn.

If snaking doesn't resolve the issue, you may need **hydro jetting (\$350-\$600)** for more thorough cleaning, especially if grease buildup or tree roots are the culprit. **Prevention is key** - avoid flushing non-biodegradable items and consider annual main line maintenance if you've had recurring issues.

For an accurate quote on your specific main drain situation, request a free estimate from Ottawa Pro Plumbing to discuss your symptoms and get transparent pricing.

Q4

There's a gurgling sound coming from my sink drain. What does that mean?

Gurgling from your sink drain typically indicates a partial blockage or venting issue that's disrupting normal water flow and creating air bubbles. This sound occurs when water tries to flow past an obstruction or when air gets trapped in the drain system.

The most common cause is a **partial clog** somewhere in your drain line - often a buildup of grease, food particles, hair, or soap scum that's restricting water flow. As water moves past this restriction, it creates turbulence and air pockets that produce the gurgling sound. Kitchen sinks frequently develop grease clogs, while bathroom sinks typically deal with hair and soap buildup.

Venting problems can also cause gurgling sounds. Your plumbing system relies on vent pipes to allow air to enter the system and help water flow smoothly. If a vent becomes blocked by debris, ice, or even a bird's nest, it can create negative pressure that pulls air through the drain, causing gurgling sounds.

In Ottawa homes, gurgling can be more noticeable during **cold weather** when grease solidifies more readily in pipes, or during heavy rain when municipal systems are stressed. If multiple drains are gurgling simultaneously, this could indicate a more serious issue with your main drain line or sewer connection.

Start with simple solutions - try running hot water for several minutes to dissolve minor grease clogs, or use a plunger designed for sinks. Avoid chemical drain cleaners as they can damage pipes and are often ineffective on partial clogs. If the gurgling persists, worsens, or is accompanied by slow drainage or bad odors, it's time to call a professional plumber.

Professional drain cleaning typically costs \$150-\$300 in Ottawa and can include camera inspection to identify the exact cause. For persistent gurgling issues, Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers comprehensive drain diagnostics to prevent minor problems from becoming major blockages.

Q5

Can tree roots really grow into my sewer line and cause clogs?

Yes, tree roots absolutely can grow into sewer lines and are one of the most common causes of recurring drain clogs and sewer backups in Ottawa homes. Tree roots are naturally drawn to the moisture and nutrients in sewer pipes, and even small cracks or loose joints provide entry points for root infiltration.

How Root Infiltration Happens

Tree roots can penetrate sewer lines through tiny cracks, loose pipe joints, or small holes that develop over time. Once inside, roots grow rapidly in the nutrient-rich environment, forming thick mats that catch debris and eventually create complete blockages. Clay pipes (common in older Ottawa neighborhoods) and cast iron pipes are particularly vulnerable, though even newer PVC pipes can be affected if joints aren't properly sealed.

The problem often starts small - you might notice slower drains or occasional gurgling sounds. But as roots continue growing, they can cause complete sewer backups, forcing wastewater back into your home through floor drains, toilets, or basement fixtures. In severe cases, expanding roots can actually crack or collapse sections of pipe, requiring expensive excavation and replacement.

Ottawa-Specific Considerations

Many Ottawa homes, especially in established neighborhoods like the Glebe, Westboro, or Sandy Hill, have mature trees with extensive root systems and aging sewer infrastructure. The city's clay soil conditions can also contribute to pipe settling and joint separation over time. If your home was built before 1980, you're at higher risk for root infiltration issues.

Prevention and Solutions

Regular **camera inspections** every 2-3 years can catch root problems early before they cause major backups. Professional **hydro jetting** can clear existing roots and debris, while **root cutting** services remove larger obstructions. For recurring problems, you might need pipe lining or replacement of affected sections. Never use chemical root killers - they can damage pipes and harm the environment.

If you're experiencing slow drains, gurgling sounds, or have large trees near your sewer line, a camera inspection can determine if roots are the culprit. For a free estimate on drain cleaning or sewer line inspection, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing.

Q6

My hot water only lasts about 10 minutes now - is my water heater dying?

Short hot water duration is typically a sign your water heater needs attention, but it's not necessarily dying.

Several issues can cause this problem, and some are repairable while others indicate it's time for replacement.

The most common cause is sediment buildup in the bottom of your tank water heater. Over time, minerals from Ottawa's moderately hard water settle at the bottom of the tank, reducing the available space for heated water and insulating the heating element from the water. This makes your water heater work harder and provides less hot

water. A professional can drain and flush your tank to remove this sediment, which often restores normal hot water capacity.

Other potential causes include a failing heating element (in electric units), a malfunctioning dip tube that's allowing cold and hot water to mix, or thermostat issues. If your water heater is over 8-10 years old and experiencing this problem, the internal components may be wearing out. Gas water heaters might have issues with the burner or gas control valve.

In Ottawa's climate, water heaters work harder during winter months when incoming water is colder, which can accelerate wear on older units. If your water heater is showing other signs like rusty water, strange noises, or visible corrosion, replacement is likely the better option than repeated repairs.

Start by checking the age of your unit - most tank water heaters last 8-12 years in Ottawa. If it's newer, a professional diagnosis can often identify repairable issues. If it's older and having multiple problems, investing in a new high-efficiency unit will provide better long-term value and reliability.

For a proper diagnosis of your water heater issue, Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers free consultations to help determine whether repair or replacement is your best option.

Q7

What causes recurring clogs in the same drain over and over?

Recurring clogs in the same drain typically indicate an underlying problem beyond just accumulated debris

- it's your drain telling you something deeper is wrong that needs professional attention.

The most common cause is **partial blockages that never fully clear**. When you snake or plunge a drain, you might create a temporary opening through the clog, but leave behind buildup on the pipe walls. Hair, soap scum, grease, and other debris continue accumulating on these rough surfaces, quickly reforming the blockage. This is especially common in bathroom sinks and shower drains where hair and soap create sticky traps for other materials.

Pipe problems are another frequent culprit. Bellied or sagging pipes create low spots where debris settles and accumulates. Tree roots infiltrating sewer lines cause recurring blockages as they grow and trap waste. Damaged pipes with cracks or joint separations allow debris to catch and build up. In Ottawa's older neighborhoods, aging cast iron or clay sewer lines are particularly susceptible to root intrusion and structural issues.

Improper drain slope or installation can also cause chronic problems. Drains need proper pitch to carry waste away effectively - typically 1-2% grade for most residential applications. Pipes installed too flat or with reverse slopes will never drain completely, leaving standing water and debris behind.

For kitchen drains, **grease buildup** is often the recurring villain. Even small amounts of cooking oil and food particles create sticky coatings that trap more debris over time. In Ottawa's cold climate, grease can solidify more readily in pipes, making the problem worse during winter months.

Professional camera inspection is the best way to diagnose recurring clogs. This allows us to see exactly what's happening inside your pipes - whether it's root intrusion, pipe damage, improper slope, or heavy buildup. Based on what we find, solutions might include hydro jetting to thoroughly clean pipe walls, pipe repair or replacement, or installing cleanouts for easier future maintenance.

Don't keep fighting the same clog repeatedly - it's usually a sign of a bigger issue that will only get worse. For a thorough diagnosis of your recurring drain problems, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing for camera inspection and professional solutions.

Q8

Why is my hot water suddenly coming out rusty brown?

Rusty brown hot water is typically caused by sediment buildup or corrosion inside your water heater tank, and it needs immediate attention to prevent further damage to your plumbing system.

The most common cause is **sediment accumulation** at the bottom of your water heater tank. Over time, minerals from Ottawa's water supply settle and create a layer of rust-colored debris. When this sediment gets stirred up - often due to increased water usage or temperature changes - it flows out through your hot water taps. This is especially common in older water heaters (8+ years) that haven't had regular maintenance.

Corrosion of the tank's interior is another serious possibility. If the anode rod (a sacrificial metal component designed to prevent tank corrosion) has deteriorated completely, the tank walls begin rusting. This creates the brown discoloration you're seeing. In Ottawa's climate, where water heaters work harder during cold months, this corrosion can accelerate if the unit isn't properly maintained.

Check if the discoloration appears only in hot water - if cold water is also brown, the issue may be with Ottawa's water supply or your home's pipes rather than the water heater. Contact the City of Ottawa if cold water is affected. However, if only hot water shows discoloration, the problem is definitely your water heater.

Don't ignore this issue - rusty water can stain fixtures, damage appliances, and indicate your water heater is nearing failure. Running the water heater with significant sediment buildup forces it to work harder, increasing energy costs and shortening its lifespan. If the tank is corroding internally, it could eventually leak and cause water damage.

Flush your water heater immediately by draining several gallons from the drain valve at the bottom of the tank. If water runs clear after 10-15 minutes, sediment was likely the culprit. However, if water remains discolored or you're uncomfortable performing this maintenance, contact a licensed plumber. For a professional diagnosis and water heater service in Ottawa, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing to ensure your system is operating safely and efficiently.

Q9

What size water heater do I need for a family of 4 in a 3-bedroom house?

For a family of 4 in a 3-bedroom house, you'll typically need a **40-50 gallon tank water heater** or an **8-10 GPM tankless unit**. The exact size depends on your family's hot water usage patterns and how many fixtures might run simultaneously.

Tank water heaters are sized based on your peak hour demand - the busiest hour for hot water use in your home. A family of 4 typically uses 60-80 gallons during peak morning routines (showers, dishwasher, laundry). A 40-gallon

tank with a good recovery rate can handle this, while a 50-gallon tank provides more buffer for back-to-back showers or simultaneous use. Gas units recover faster than electric, so you might get away with a smaller tank if you have natural gas.

Tankless water heaters are sized by flow rate (gallons per minute). In Ottawa's cold climate, incoming water temperature averages 8-10°C, so you need more power to heat it to 50°C. An 8 GPM unit handles one shower plus a sink, while 10 GPM allows two showers running simultaneously. Tankless units cost more upfront (\$3,500-\$5,500 installed) but save space and energy long-term.

Ottawa-specific considerations include our hard water, which can reduce efficiency over time, and cold winters that affect tankless performance. Many Ottawa homes have natural gas available, which is more cost-effective for heating water than electricity. Tank replacements typically run \$1,500-\$2,500 installed, depending on the unit and any venting modifications needed.

Consider your family's habits - teenagers taking long showers, multiple bathrooms, or running appliances during morning routines all increase your needs. A licensed plumber can perform a proper load calculation based on your fixtures and usage patterns. For a free assessment of your home's hot water needs, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing.

Q10

Is it normal for water to pool around the base of my water heater?

No, water pooling around your water heater base is not normal and indicates a problem that needs immediate attention. This is typically a sign of a leak that can cause water damage, mold growth, and potentially dangerous conditions if left unaddressed.

Common causes of water pooling include a leaking tank (often from corrosion at the bottom), loose pipe connections, a faulty temperature and pressure relief valve, or condensation issues. Tank leaks are the most serious concern, as they usually mean the water heater is nearing the end of its lifespan and could fail completely without warning. Pipe connection leaks are often easier and less expensive to repair, while T&P valve issues require immediate professional attention for safety reasons.

In Ottawa's climate, condensation can sometimes occur on water heater tanks during humid summer months or in poorly ventilated basements, but this should be minimal moisture, not actual pooling. True water accumulation almost always indicates a mechanical problem rather than environmental conditions.

Safety considerations are important here - if you have a gas water heater, water near the unit can create safety hazards with the pilot light or gas connections. Electric units can pose electrical risks if water reaches any wiring. Turn off the power supply to your water heater and avoid standing water around the unit until a professional can assess the situation.

Your next step should be to identify the source of the water by checking all visible connections and looking for obvious drips or streams. Take photos of the pooling water and any visible damage for your plumber. Most water heater leaks require professional repair or replacement, and in Ottawa, this work requires proper permits and licensed installation to meet Ontario Building Code requirements.

For a professional assessment of your water heater issue, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing - we can quickly diagnose the problem and provide same-day solutions to prevent further water damage.

Q11

Should I flush my water heater and how often?

Yes, you should flush your water heater annually to remove sediment buildup that reduces efficiency and shortens the unit's lifespan. This is one of the most important maintenance tasks for extending your water heater's life.

Sediment accumulation happens naturally as minerals in Ottawa's water supply settle at the bottom of your tank over time. This buildup acts like an insulating blanket, forcing your water heater to work harder to heat water, which increases energy costs and can cause premature failure. The sediment also creates hot spots that can damage the tank lining and heating elements.

The flushing process involves connecting a garden hose to the drain valve at the bottom of your tank and draining several tank-fulls of water until it runs clear. However, this isn't as simple as it sounds - the water is scalding hot, the drain valve can be corroded or difficult to operate, and improper technique can damage your unit or create flooding.

In Ottawa's hard water areas, you might need flushing every 6-8 months rather than annually. Signs your water heater needs attention include rumbling or popping noises, reduced hot water capacity, rusty or cloudy hot water, or higher energy bills. If your water heater is over 8 years old and has never been flushed, the sediment may be so compacted that flushing could actually cause leaks by disturbing the settled material.

For most homeowners, professional maintenance is the safer choice. A licensed plumber can properly flush your system, inspect the anode rod, check for leaks, and identify potential problems before they become expensive repairs. For a free consultation about water heater maintenance or replacement, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing.

Q12

Why does my tankless water heater give me cold water sandwiches?

Cold water sandwiches happen when your tankless water heater briefly delivers cold water in the middle of what should be a continuous hot water flow. This occurs because tankless units heat water on-demand, and there's a delay between when you turn on the tap and when the unit detects flow and fires up the heating elements.

The most common cause is **intermittent water flow**. When you turn on a tap, the initial cold water in the pipes flows out first. The tankless unit then kicks in and heats the water. But if you briefly reduce the flow rate or turn the tap off and on again, the unit may shut down momentarily, allowing another slug of cold water to pass through before it restarts. This creates that unpleasant "sandwich" of hot-cold-hot water.

Flow rate sensitivity is another culprit. Most tankless units require a minimum flow rate (typically 0.5-0.75 gallons per minute) to activate. If your flow drops below this threshold - common with low-flow fixtures or when someone else uses water elsewhere in the house - the unit shuts off, sending cold water until flow increases again.

In Ottawa's climate, **incoming water temperature** affects performance significantly. During winter months, your groundwater temperature can drop to around 4°C (39°F), requiring more energy and time for the unit to reach target temperature. This can worsen the cold water sandwich effect, especially with older or undersized units.

Distance from the unit also matters. If your tankless water heater is far from the fixture you're using, there's more cold water sitting in the pipes that needs to be flushed out each time, making the problem more noticeable.

To minimize cold water sandwiches, avoid turning taps on and off repeatedly, maintain steady flow rates, and consider installing a small recirculation system if the problem is severe. If the issue persists or worsens, your unit may need professional adjustment of the flow sensor or temperature settings. For persistent problems with your tankless system, Ottawa Pro Plumbing can diagnose whether it's a flow rate issue, unit sizing problem, or if adjustments to your system would help.

Q13

What causes pipes to burst, and how can I prevent it?

Pipes burst primarily due to freezing temperatures, excessive water pressure, aging materials, and corrosion. In Ottawa's harsh winters, frozen pipes are the leading cause of burst pipes, but several other factors can lead to this costly emergency.

Freezing is the most common culprit in Ottawa homes. When water freezes inside pipes, it expands by about 9%, creating tremendous pressure that can crack or split the pipe. This typically happens in unheated areas like crawl spaces, exterior walls, or uninsulated basements. Even a small crack can release hundreds of gallons of water once it thaws.

High water pressure is another major cause. Ottawa's municipal water pressure typically runs between 40-80 PSI, but pressure spikes or improperly adjusted pressure reducing valves can stress pipes beyond their limits. Old galvanized steel pipes are particularly vulnerable, as they've already been weakened by decades of corrosion and mineral buildup.

Age and material degradation play significant roles. Homes built before 1960 often have galvanized steel pipes that corrode from the inside out, while even newer copper pipes can develop pinhole leaks due to Ottawa's relatively hard water. Tree root intrusion into sewer lines can also cause backups that stress the entire plumbing system.

Prevention starts with winterization. Keep your home heated to at least 15°C even when away, open cabinet doors under sinks during cold snaps to allow warm air circulation, and let faucets drip slightly during extreme cold. Insulate pipes in unheated areas and seal air leaks around pipe penetrations.

Regular maintenance prevents most other causes. Have your water pressure checked annually - it should stay between 40-60 PSI. Consider replacing galvanized pipes if your home is over 40 years old, and have your plumbing system inspected every few years to catch problems early. Install a whole-home surge protector for your plumbing system if you experience frequent pressure fluctuations.

Know your main water shutoff valve location and test it annually to ensure it works. In an emergency, shutting off the main water supply immediately can save thousands in water damage. For comprehensive pipe inspection and preventive maintenance, Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers free consultations to help identify vulnerable areas before they become expensive emergencies.

Q14

Is it bad if my copper pipes have green stuff on them?

Green buildup on copper pipes is usually copper corrosion (patina or verdigris), which isn't immediately dangerous but indicates ongoing chemical reactions that need attention. While the green substance itself isn't toxic in small amounts, it signals potential issues with your plumbing system that could lead to leaks or water quality problems.

What causes the green buildup: The green coloration comes from copper oxidation, typically caused by exposure to moisture, acidic conditions, or electrolytic reactions. This commonly happens at pipe joints, fittings, or areas where pipes contact other metals. In Ottawa's climate, condensation on cold water pipes in basements or crawl spaces often accelerates this process, especially during humid summer months.

When to be concerned: If you see green buildup spreading rapidly, notice water discoloration, taste metallic flavors, or find the corrosion near joints and fittings, it's time for professional evaluation. Pinhole leaks often develop in areas with heavy corrosion, and Ottawa's water chemistry can be particularly hard on older copper installations. The green substance can also indicate galvanic corrosion if your copper pipes are connected to different metals without proper dielectric unions.

Immediate steps: Clean visible buildup with a paste of baking soda and water, then dry the area thoroughly. Check for any signs of moisture or small leaks around the affected pipes. Improve ventilation in the area if possible, and consider having your water tested for pH levels and mineral content, as acidic water accelerates copper corrosion.

Professional assessment recommended: A licensed plumber should inspect extensive green buildup to determine if pipe replacement is needed and identify the root cause. In Ottawa, many homes built before 1990 have copper plumbing that may be approaching replacement time, and addressing corrosion early prevents costly water damage from eventual pipe failure.

Q15

Can a pinhole leak in a copper pipe be patched, or does the pipe need replacing?

A pinhole leak in copper pipe can often be temporarily patched, but pipe replacement is usually the better long-term solution. The best approach depends on the pipe's age, the extent of corrosion, and whether this is an isolated leak or part of a larger deterioration pattern.

Temporary patching options include pipe repair clamps, epoxy putty, or rubber patches with hose clamps. These can stop the immediate leak and prevent water damage while you plan for a permanent solution. However, these

are band-aid fixes that typically last 6 months to 2 years at most.

The underlying issue with pinhole leaks is that they're usually caused by internal corrosion, particularly in Ottawa's water conditions. When one pinhole appears, others often follow within months or years. The pipe wall has thinned throughout that section, making it vulnerable to additional failures. This is especially common in copper pipes installed in the 1980s and 1990s.

In Ottawa's market, a section of copper pipe replacement typically costs \$400-\$1,000 depending on accessibility and length, while a temporary patch might cost \$150-\$300. However, if you're dealing with multiple leaks or pipes over 25 years old, whole-home repiping with PEX might be more cost-effective long-term, ranging from \$5,000-\$15,000.

For immediate water damage prevention, shut off water to that section if possible and call for emergency repair. A licensed plumber can assess whether the leak is isolated or indicates broader pipe deterioration. They'll also ensure any permanent repairs meet Ontario Building Code requirements and handle permits if needed.

For a professional assessment of your copper pipe situation, Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers free consultations to help determine the most cost-effective repair strategy.

Q16

What is a backwater valve, and do I need one in Ottawa?

A **backwater valve** is a one-way valve installed in your main sewer line that prevents sewage from flowing back into your home during heavy rains or sewer system overloads. It allows wastewater to flow out to the city sewer but automatically closes when water tries to flow back toward your house.

How it works: The valve contains a flapper or gate that opens when water flows out from your home but snaps shut when reverse flow is detected. This prevents the nightmare scenario of raw sewage backing up through your basement drains, toilets, or floor drains during storm events or municipal sewer overflows.

Ottawa-specific requirements make backwater valves particularly important. The city experiences significant spring runoff and intense summer storms that can overwhelm the combined sewer system in older neighborhoods. Many areas of Ottawa, especially those built before 1960, have combined storm and sanitary sewers that are more prone to backup issues. While not legally required for existing homes, the City of Ottawa **strongly recommends** backwater valves and offers rebate programs to encourage installation.

You likely need one if your home has basement fixtures (laundry, bathroom, floor drains), you live in an older Ottawa neighborhood, or you've experienced any previous sewer backup issues. Even newer subdivisions can benefit, as municipal systems can still become overwhelmed during extreme weather events that are becoming more common.

Installation costs in Ottawa typically range from \$2,500 to \$4,500, including permits and professional installation. The city offers rebates up to \$1,750 for qualifying installations. Remember that installation requires excavation and must be done by a licensed plumber with proper permits - this isn't a DIY project.

For a free assessment of whether your Ottawa home would benefit from a backwater valve, request a consultation from Ottawa Pro Plumbing to discuss your specific situation and potential rebate eligibility.

Q17

How often should I have my sewer line inspected?

Most Ottawa homeowners should have their sewer line inspected every 3-5 years, though older homes or those with recurring drain issues may benefit from more frequent inspections every 1-2 years.

Professional sewer line inspections use specialized camera equipment to identify problems before they become expensive emergencies. During an inspection, a licensed plumber feeds a high-resolution camera through your

main sewer line to check for cracks, root intrusion, blockages, or deteriorating pipe conditions. This proactive approach can save thousands in emergency repairs and prevent sewage backups in your basement.

In Ottawa's climate, sewer lines face unique challenges that make regular inspections particularly valuable. Our freeze-thaw cycles can stress older clay or cast iron pipes, while mature trees common in established Ottawa neighborhoods often send roots into sewer lines seeking moisture. Properties built before 1960 are especially susceptible to issues, as many still have original clay tile or cast iron sewer lines that are nearing the end of their lifespan.

Consider more frequent inspections if you've experienced slow drains, gurgling sounds, sewer odors, or previous backups. Homes with large trees near the sewer line, frequent drain clogs, or pipes over 40 years old should also be monitored more closely. The City of Ottawa requires backwater valve installation in many areas prone to flooding, and a sewer inspection helps determine if your line can handle these protective devices.

A typical sewer camera inspection in Ottawa costs \$200-\$350 and takes about an hour. This small investment can identify minor issues before they become major problems requiring full line replacement, which can cost \$8,000-\$15,000. For peace of mind about your sewer line's condition, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing for professional camera inspection services.

Q18

What is the difference between a septic system and being on a city sewer?

Septic systems treat wastewater on your property using a tank and drain field, while **city sewer** connects your home to municipal treatment facilities through underground pipes. The choice depends on your location - most urban Ottawa properties connect to city sewer, while rural areas typically use septic systems.

How Septic Systems Work A septic system consists of a septic tank (usually concrete or plastic) that holds wastewater from your home, allowing solids to settle and partially decompose. The liquid effluent then flows to a drain field (leach bed) where soil naturally filters the water. The system relies on bacteria to break down waste and requires regular pumping every 2-4 years to remove accumulated solids.

City Sewer Connection With city sewer, wastewater flows from your home through service lines to municipal sewer mains, then to treatment plants. You pay monthly sewer fees based on water usage, and the city handles all treatment and maintenance of the main system. Your responsibility ends at your property line, though you're still responsible for the service line from your house to the main.

Ottawa-Specific Context In Ottawa, most urban and suburban properties connect to the city's sewer system, with fees included in your water bill. Rural properties in the former townships often use septic systems. If you're buying rural property, septic inspections are crucial - a failed system can cost \$15,000-\$30,000 to replace. The City of Ottawa requires permits for septic installations and major repairs.

Maintenance and Costs Septic systems require more homeowner involvement - regular pumping, careful water usage, and avoiding harsh chemicals that kill beneficial bacteria. City sewer is more convenient but comes with ongoing monthly fees. Both systems can experience backups, but septic issues are typically your responsibility while city sewer backups may be covered by municipal insurance if the problem originates in city infrastructure.

Key Considerations Never flush inappropriate items down either system - grease, wipes, and chemicals can cause expensive problems. If you're experiencing sewer backups or septic issues, professional diagnosis is essential to prevent property damage and health hazards.

Q19

Can I plant trees near my sewer line, or will the roots cause problems?

Tree roots are one of the leading causes of sewer line blockages and damage, so careful planning is essential when planting near your sewer lines. Most tree species will naturally grow roots toward water sources, and your sewer line provides exactly that.

The main concern is root intrusion through pipe joints and small cracks. Even healthy sewer lines have connection points where roots can penetrate, and older clay or cast iron pipes are particularly vulnerable. Once roots enter your sewer line, they create a web that catches debris, leading to recurring blockages. Over time, expanding roots can crack or completely collapse pipes, requiring expensive excavation and replacement.

Safe planting distances depend on the tree species and your pipe material. As a general rule, plant large trees (maple, oak, willow) at least 10 feet from sewer lines, medium trees (birch, cherry) at least 6 feet away, and small ornamental trees at least 4 feet away. However, some species like willows, poplars, and silver maples are particularly aggressive root seekers and should be planted even farther from sewer infrastructure.

In Ottawa, many homes have older sewer connections that are more susceptible to root damage. Clay tile sewers, common in older Ottawa neighborhoods, have multiple joints where roots can enter. If you're unsure about your sewer line's condition or location, Ottawa Pro Plumbing can perform a camera inspection to assess the pipe material and identify any existing root intrusion before you plant.

Consider root barriers or choose trees with less aggressive root systems if you want to plant closer to your sewer line. Slow-growing trees with compact root systems, like serviceberry or redbud, pose less risk. You can also install root barriers - plastic or metal sheets that redirect roots away from your sewer line.

If you're already experiencing slow drains or gurgling sounds, roots may have already found your sewer line. For a camera inspection to check your sewer line condition before planting, or if you suspect root intrusion, contact Ottawa Pro Plumbing for professional assessment and root removal services.

Q20

A pipe burst in my wall - how do I shut off the water quickly?

Immediately locate your main water shut-off valve and turn it clockwise (righty-tighty) to stop all water flow to your home. This is typically found where the water line enters your house - often in the basement near the front wall, utility room, or sometimes outside near the water meter.

Finding your main shut-off valve is critical in this emergency. In Ottawa homes, it's usually a wheel-style valve or lever located on the main water line coming into your basement. If you have a newer home, it might be a quarter-turn ball valve that you turn 90 degrees. Some Ottawa properties have the shut-off outside in a covered pit near the street - you may need a water meter key tool to turn it.

After shutting off the main water, turn on faucets throughout your home to drain remaining water from the pipes and relieve pressure. This helps minimize additional water damage. If the burst pipe is near electrical outlets or fixtures, shut off electricity to that area at your breaker panel for safety.

Time is critical with burst pipes - even a small pipe can release hundreds of gallons per hour, causing extensive water damage to drywall, flooring, and belongings. Document the damage with photos for insurance purposes, and start removing water and wet materials if safe to do so.

This requires immediate professional attention as the pipe will need proper repair and the wall will likely need to be opened to access the damage. Ottawa's freezing winters make burst pipes common, especially in exterior walls or unheated areas. A licensed plumber can locate the exact break, repair it properly, and ensure your plumbing meets Ontario Building Code requirements.

For emergency pipe repair in Ottawa, Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers 24/7 service to get your water restored quickly and prevent further damage to your home.

Q21

I smell gas near my water heater - should I call a plumber or the gas company?

Leave your home immediately and call the gas company first - this is a potential gas leak emergency that requires immediate attention from Enbridge Gas (1-866-763-5427) or your local gas utility.

Do not attempt to locate the source of the smell, turn lights on/off, use electrical devices, or light matches.

Exit the building immediately and call the gas company from a safe location away from your home. They will dispatch emergency technicians to assess the situation and make it safe. Gas leaks can lead to explosions or carbon monoxide poisoning, so time is critical.

In Ottawa, gas emergencies are handled by the utility company first, then plumbers. Once the gas company has made the area safe and identified the source, they may determine that the issue is with your water heater connections, venting, or the appliance itself. At that point, you'll need a licensed plumber who is qualified to work on gas appliances to make the necessary repairs.

After the emergency is resolved, a qualified plumber should inspect your water heater system. Common causes of gas odors near water heaters include loose connections, faulty gas valves, improper venting, or issues with the combustion chamber. A licensed plumber can diagnose the problem and ensure your water heater is operating safely according to Ontario Building Code requirements.

Never ignore gas odors - even faint smells require immediate action. Once your system is repaired and safe, consider having annual maintenance performed on your gas water heater to prevent future issues and ensure proper ventilation and gas connections.

For water heater repairs after a gas emergency is resolved, Ottawa Pro Plumbing works with qualified gas technicians to restore safe operation of your system.

Q22

Is it possible that a plumbing issue could be causing water to pour from my ceiling?

Yes, plumbing issues are one of the most common causes of water pouring from ceilings. This is a serious emergency that requires immediate action to prevent extensive water damage to your home.

The most likely plumbing culprits include a burst pipe in the wall or ceiling cavity, a leaking water heater above, toilet seal failure on the floor above, or a failed supply line to a fixture like a sink or washing machine. In Ottawa's climate, frozen pipes that burst during winter thaws are particularly common causes of sudden ceiling leaks. The water may travel along joists or through insulation before finding the lowest point to drip through your ceiling.

Immediate action is critical - shut off your main water supply immediately if you suspect a plumbing leak. This valve is typically located near where the water line enters your home or by your water meter. Move any furniture or belongings away from the affected area, and place buckets to catch the water. If there's significant water accumulation in the ceiling, you may need to carefully puncture the lowest point to prevent a larger collapse.

Don't attempt to locate the source yourself - water can travel significant distances through walls and ceilings before appearing as a leak. What looks like a small drip can indicate a major pipe failure hidden in your home's structure. Professional leak detection equipment can pinpoint the exact source without causing unnecessary damage to your walls or ceilings.

This situation requires immediate professional attention. Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers 24/7 emergency service for situations exactly like this. The longer water pours from your ceiling, the more extensive (and expensive) the damage becomes to your drywall, insulation, flooring, and personal belongings.

Q23

How much does a plumber charge per hour in Ottawa?

Most licensed plumbers in Ottawa charge between \$100-150 per hour, with emergency and after-hours rates typically ranging from \$150-200 per hour. However, many plumbing jobs are quoted as flat-rate pricing rather than hourly rates.

Flat-rate pricing is becoming more common because it gives homeowners certainty about costs upfront. For example, a drain clearing might be quoted at \$200-300 regardless of whether it takes 30 minutes or 2 hours. This

protects you from unexpected costs if the job takes longer than expected.

Emergency service calls in Ottawa typically include a service call fee of \$150-250, which often gets applied toward the repair cost. Weekend and holiday rates are usually 1.5x the regular rate. Licensed plumbers with proper insurance and WSIB coverage may charge slightly more than unlicensed handymen, but you get the protection of proper licensing, insurance, and warranty on the work.

Factors affecting hourly rates include the plumber's experience level, whether permits are required, complexity of the work, and time of day. Simple repairs like faucet replacement might be quoted as a flat fee, while diagnostic work or complex installations are more likely to be hourly.

For the best value, get quotes from multiple licensed plumbers and ask whether they charge hourly or flat-rate pricing. Many reputable plumbing companies offer free estimates for larger projects, which can help you budget accurately. For a free consultation on your specific plumbing needs, Ottawa Pro Plumbing provides transparent pricing through the Ottawa Construction Network.

Q24

Are there any plumbing rebates available in Ottawa right now?

Yes, there are several plumbing-related rebates available to Ottawa residents in 2024-2025, primarily through Enbridge Gas Ontario and the federal government's greener homes programs.

Enbridge Gas Ontario offers rebates for high-efficiency water heaters - up to \$1,000 for qualifying tankless water heaters and up to \$500 for high-efficiency tank models. These rebates apply to natural gas units that meet specific efficiency ratings. The program also includes rebates for other water heating upgrades like solar water heating systems.

The federal Greener Homes Grant program provides up to \$5,000 for eligible home energy retrofits, which can include water heater upgrades as part of a comprehensive energy efficiency improvement plan. This requires a pre- and post-retrofit energy assessment by a certified advisor.

Ottawa Hydro occasionally offers rebates for electric water heater upgrades, though these programs vary by season and availability. Some utility rebates focus on heat pump water heaters, which can qualify for both federal and utility incentives when stacked properly.

For sewer-related work, the City of Ottawa offers grants for backwater valve installation (up to \$1,250) and sump pump installation (up to \$875) through their Residential Protective Plumbing Program. These help prevent

basement flooding and are particularly valuable given Ottawa's climate challenges.

Important considerations: Rebate programs change frequently, have specific eligibility requirements, and often require pre-approval before starting work. Licensed contractors familiar with rebate programs can help ensure your installation meets all requirements and maximize your savings.

For current rebate availability and to ensure your plumbing upgrade qualifies, request a consultation with Ottawa Pro Plumbing - we stay updated on all available incentive programs.

Q25

What is included in a typical plumbing service call fee?

A typical plumbing service call fee in Ottawa covers the **plumber's time to travel to your home, diagnose the problem, and provide you with a repair estimate**. This fee is charged whether or not you proceed with the recommended repairs.

What's included in the service call: The service call fee covers the plumber's diagnostic time, which includes inspecting your plumbing issue, identifying the root cause, and explaining your repair options. Most reputable plumbers will also provide a written estimate for any recommended work. The plumber brings basic diagnostic tools like cameras for drain inspection, leak detection equipment, and testing instruments to properly assess your situation.

Ottawa market pricing for service calls typically ranges from \$150 to \$250, with some companies charging higher rates for evenings, weekends, or emergency calls. Many Ottawa plumbers will **credit the service call fee toward your repair** if you choose to proceed with their recommended work, making the diagnostic visit essentially free when you hire them for the repair.

What happens after the service call: Once the plumber identifies the issue, they'll provide you with a detailed estimate for parts and labor. You're under no obligation to proceed with the repairs, but you will still owe the service call fee for their time and expertise. Some companies offer flat-rate pricing where they'll quote the total job cost upfront, while others charge hourly rates plus materials.

Emergency service calls typically cost more - often \$200 to \$300 - but provide the same diagnostic service with faster response times. The investment in a proper diagnostic service call can save you money by ensuring the real problem gets fixed the first time, rather than attempting multiple DIY solutions that may not address the root cause.

For a transparent service call and repair estimate, request a consultation from Ottawa Pro Plumbing to discuss your specific plumbing needs.

Q26

Do I need a water softener if I live in Ottawa?

Most Ottawa homes don't require water softeners since the city's water supply is naturally soft to moderately soft, with hardness levels typically ranging from 80-120 mg/L (4.7-7.0 grains per gallon).

Ottawa's municipal water comes primarily from the Ottawa River and undergoes extensive treatment at the Britannia and Lemieux Island water treatment plants. The natural water chemistry in this region produces relatively soft water compared to areas with high limestone content. **Water hardness becomes problematic above 180 mg/L (10.5 grains)**, so Ottawa's levels are generally within acceptable ranges for most households.

However, **some Ottawa neighborhoods may experience harder water** depending on their proximity to different water sources or local geological conditions. Areas closer to limestone bedrock or those served by wells rather than municipal water may have higher mineral content. If you're experiencing signs of hard water like soap scum buildup, dry skin after showering, or white mineral deposits on fixtures, it's worth testing your specific water supply.

Consider a water test first before investing in a softener system. You can request a free water quality report from the City of Ottawa or have a professional water analysis done. Many Ottawa residents find that a basic water filter system addresses their primary concerns about taste and odor without needing the ongoing maintenance and salt requirements of a full softening system.

If testing reveals your water is indeed hard, a water softener installation typically costs \$1,500-\$3,500 in the Ottawa market, plus ongoing salt and maintenance expenses. For a professional water quality assessment and softener installation if needed, Ottawa Pro Plumbing can connect you with experienced plumbers through the Ottawa Construction Network.

Q27

Is the tap water in Ottawa safe to drink, or should I get a filter?

Ottawa's tap water is safe to drink and meets all Health Canada standards. The City of Ottawa treats water from the Ottawa River and conducts over 200,000 tests annually to ensure quality and safety.

Water Quality in Ottawa

Ottawa's municipal water system provides high-quality drinking water that's regularly tested for bacteria, chemicals, and other contaminants. The city publishes annual water quality reports showing consistent compliance with provincial and federal drinking water standards. The water treatment process includes filtration, disinfection with chlorine, and fluoridation for dental health.

However, many Ottawa residents still choose filtration systems for **taste preferences** rather than safety concerns. The chlorine used for disinfection can create a taste or odor that some people find unpleasant, especially in older neighborhoods with aging distribution pipes. Additionally, Ottawa's water is moderately hard (containing minerals like calcium and magnesium), which can affect taste and cause mineral buildup in appliances.

When Filtration Makes Sense

Consider a water filter if you notice taste, odor, or cloudiness issues, or if you have **older plumbing in your home** that might contribute metallic tastes. Homes built before 1950 may have lead service lines, though the city has been replacing these systematically. A simple carbon filter pitcher or faucet-mounted filter can address taste and odor concerns for most households.

For comprehensive water testing or if you're considering a whole-home filtration system, Ottawa Pro Plumbing can assess your specific water quality needs and recommend appropriate solutions. We can also inspect your home's plumbing to identify any issues that might affect water quality at the tap.

Q28

What causes low water pressure throughout my whole house?

Low water pressure throughout your entire house is typically caused by issues with your main water supply, water meter, or the pipes leading into your home, rather than individual fixture problems.

The most common culprits are **mineral buildup in your main water line**, a **partially closed main shutoff valve**, or **corroded galvanized steel pipes** if your Ottawa home was built before the 1980s. Many older homes in areas like the Glebe, Westboro, and Hintonburg still have original galvanized pipes that gradually restrict water flow as they corrode from the inside. A **failing pressure regulator** (if your home has one) can also cause whole-house pressure drops.

City-side issues can also affect your water pressure. Ottawa's water system occasionally experiences pressure fluctuations, especially during peak usage times or maintenance work. Your **water meter or the connection between the city main and your home** might be partially blocked or damaged. In some Ottawa neighborhoods, homes at higher elevations naturally experience lower pressure.

Check your main shutoff valve first - it should be fully open. If you have a pressure gauge, normal residential water pressure should be between 40-60 PSI. Anything below 40 PSI throughout the house indicates a supply problem that needs professional attention. Don't attempt to adjust pressure regulators yourself, as incorrect settings can damage fixtures and appliances.

For whole-house pressure issues, you'll need a licensed plumber to diagnose whether it's your home's plumbing system or a city supply problem. They can test pressure at multiple points, inspect your main line, and coordinate with the City of Ottawa if needed. For a free assessment of your water pressure concerns, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing.

Q29

Is it true that old houses in Ottawa might have lead pipes?

Yes, many older homes in Ottawa do have lead pipes, particularly those built before the 1950s. Lead was commonly used for water service lines (the pipe connecting your home to the city water main) and sometimes for interior plumbing in homes constructed in the early-to-mid 20th century.

Ottawa has been actively addressing this issue through its Lead Service Line Replacement Program. The city has been systematically replacing lead service lines on public property and encouraging homeowners to replace

the portion on private property. If your home was built before 1955, there's a good chance you may have a lead service line or lead plumbing components.

Health concerns with lead pipes are significant, especially for pregnant women and young children, as lead can leach into drinking water over time. The risk increases with older pipes, acidic water conditions, and when water sits in the pipes for extended periods. Even small amounts of lead exposure can cause developmental issues in children and health problems in adults.

To determine if you have lead pipes, look for the service line where it enters your basement - lead pipes are dull gray, soft enough to scratch with a coin, and will leave a metallic mark when scratched. You can also contact the City of Ottawa to check if your property is on their lead service line inventory, or have your water tested for lead content.

If you discover lead pipes, don't panic but take action. Run cold water for 30 seconds to 2 minutes before drinking if it's been sitting in the pipes, use only cold water for drinking and cooking, and consider a certified water filter. Most importantly, plan for replacement - while the city replaces the public portion, homeowners are responsible for the private side.

For lead pipe replacement or water line upgrades, you'll need a licensed plumber familiar with Ottawa's requirements and permit processes. Want to discuss your specific situation? We offer free consultations to assess your plumbing and recommend the best approach for your home's safety.

Q30

What plumbing maintenance should I do before winter in Ottawa?

Winterizing your plumbing is essential in Ottawa's harsh climate to prevent costly freeze damage. Start these preparations in late October or early November before temperatures consistently drop below freezing.

Outdoor plumbing protection is your first priority. Shut off water to exterior hose bibs and drain all water from the lines - even a small amount of trapped water can cause pipes to burst when it freezes. Remove and store garden hoses indoors, and consider installing frost-proof hose bibs if you have older fixtures. If you have an irrigation system, have it professionally blown out and winterized.

Indoor pipe insulation prevents freezing in vulnerable areas like crawl spaces, basements, and exterior walls. Wrap exposed pipes with foam insulation sleeves, paying special attention to pipes near exterior walls, in unheated garages, or in cold basements. **Seal air leaks** around pipes where they enter your home - cold air infiltration is often the culprit in pipe freezing.

Water heater maintenance becomes more critical in winter when the unit works harder. Flush your tank water heater to remove sediment buildup, check the temperature setting (120°F is optimal), and test the pressure relief valve. For tankless units, ensure proper venting and consider a maintenance service call. In Ottawa's climate, a well-maintained water heater is crucial since repairs in winter can leave you without hot water for days.

Sump pump preparation is vital given Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycles. Test your sump pump by pouring water into the pit - it should activate and pump water out efficiently. Check that the discharge line won't freeze (consider a heated discharge line if needed), and ensure you have backup power options during winter storms.

Additional winter prep includes checking for drafts around plumbing fixtures, knowing where your main water shutoff is located, and keeping your home heated to at least 15°C even when away. Consider having your main sewer line inspected if you've had issues - frozen ground can exacerbate existing problems.

For comprehensive winter plumbing preparation or if you discover issues during your inspection, Ottawa Pro Plumbing offers pre-winter maintenance services to ensure your plumbing system is ready for Ottawa's challenging winter conditions.

Q31

Why is my hot water pressure low while the cold water pressure is fine?

Low hot water pressure with normal cold water pressure typically indicates a problem with your water heater or the hot water supply lines, not your home's main water pressure system.

The most common culprit is **sediment buildup in your water heater tank**. Over time, minerals from Ottawa's moderately hard water settle at the bottom of the tank and can clog the hot water outlet pipe or dip tube. This restricts flow even though the tank is heating water properly. Tank-style water heaters are especially prone to this after 5-8 years of use.

Hot water supply lines can also develop restrictions from mineral deposits, especially in older homes with galvanized pipes. The hot water flowing through pipes accelerates corrosion and scaling compared to cold water lines. If your home has original galvanized plumbing from the 1960s-80s, this is likely contributing to the pressure loss.

For **tankless water heaters**, the issue is often a clogged heat exchanger or inlet filter. These units are sensitive to sediment and require annual maintenance to prevent flow restrictions. A partially blocked heat exchanger will reduce flow rate while still providing hot water.

Start by checking your water heater's age and maintenance history. If it's over 8 years old and hasn't been flushed recently, sediment buildup is the probable cause. You can also test the hot water pressure at different fixtures - if it's low everywhere, the problem is at the water heater. If it's only affecting certain taps, you may have localized pipe restrictions.

This requires professional diagnosis since accessing water heater components and flushing systems safely requires proper tools and experience. A licensed plumber can determine whether you need tank flushing, component replacement, or pipe repairs. For a free assessment of your hot water pressure issue, request a quote from Ottawa Pro Plumbing.

Q32

What are the signs that my plumbing is getting old and needs attention?

Aging plumbing typically shows warning signs before major failures occur. The most common indicators include frequent clogs, reduced water pressure, discolored water, unusual noises, and visible corrosion on pipes or fixtures.

Water pressure issues are often the first sign homeowners notice. If multiple fixtures have weak flow or pressure drops when you run water in different locations, your pipes may have mineral buildup or corrosion restricting flow. This is especially common in Ottawa homes with original galvanized steel pipes from the 1960s-80s. **Discolored water** - particularly rust-colored or brown water when you first turn on taps - indicates pipe corrosion and potential health concerns.

Frequent drain clogs throughout the house suggest your drain lines are accumulating buildup or may have structural issues like bellied pipes or root intrusion. In Ottawa's clay soil, tree roots commonly infiltrate older sewer lines through joints and cracks. **Strange noises** like banging pipes (water hammer), gurgling drains, or running water sounds when fixtures aren't in use all point to plumbing system problems that need professional attention.

Visible signs include water stains on walls or ceilings, musty odors suggesting hidden leaks, corroded pipe connections under sinks, and mineral deposits around fixtures. Ottawa's hard water accelerates fixture wear and pipe scaling. **Age itself** is a factor - galvanized steel pipes typically need replacement after 40-50 years, while copper pipes last 50-70 years but may develop pinhole leaks earlier in Ottawa's water conditions.

Don't wait for a catastrophic failure that could cause thousands in water damage. If you're seeing multiple warning signs or your home is over 30 years old with original plumbing, have a licensed plumber perform a comprehensive inspection. They can prioritize which systems need immediate attention versus longer-term planning. For a thorough plumbing assessment of your Ottawa home, request a consultation from Ottawa Pro Plumbing to develop a maintenance plan that prevents emergency repairs.

Q33

What does the P-trap under my sink actually do?

The P-trap under your sink creates a water seal that prevents sewer gases from entering your home while allowing wastewater to flow freely to your drain system.

How the P-trap works is elegantly simple - its curved shape holds about 2-3 inches of water at all times. This standing water acts as a barrier, blocking harmful and foul-smelling gases like hydrogen sulfide and methane from backing up through your drain pipes into your living space. When you run water down the drain, new water pushes the old water through while maintaining that crucial seal.

The trap also catches debris that might otherwise clog your main drain lines. Small items like jewelry, hair clumps, and food particles often settle in the P-trap's curve, making them easier to retrieve during cleaning. This protective function can save you from more expensive drain cleaning services down the line.

In Ottawa's climate, P-traps can occasionally cause issues during extreme cold snaps if they're located in unheated areas like basements or crawl spaces. The water seal can freeze and expand, potentially cracking the trap. Additionally, if a sink isn't used for extended periods (like a basement utility sink), the water can evaporate, breaking the seal and allowing sewer gases to enter your home.

Common P-trap problems include clogs from accumulated debris, loose connections causing leaks, and worn rubber gaskets. Most P-traps are designed to be removable for cleaning - there's usually a cleanout plug or the entire curved section unscrews. However, if you're not comfortable with this maintenance or notice persistent odors or leaks, it's time to call a professional.

If you're experiencing drain odors or slow drainage despite a clean P-trap, the issue might be deeper in your drain system. For persistent plumbing problems, Ottawa Pro Plumbing can diagnose and resolve drain issues throughout the Ottawa area.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Pro Plumbing. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any construction or renovation project. Information is current as of March 15, 2026 and may change. Visit ottawaplumbingpro.ca for the latest answers.