Water softener can make life less hard

Written by Angie Hicks
Aug. 29, 2013 |

cincinnati.com

The Cincinnati metro area has a hard water problem that's likely to shorten the lifespan of your water-using appliances.

Owning a water softener can not only soften your water but might save you money on soap, brighten your clothes, make your hair and skin softer, and add life to those appliances.

In Cincinnati, the average hardness of the water is 10 grains of dissolved minerals per gallon, which is classified as "hard" by the Water Quality Association. Loveland, meanwhile, has a water hardness of 20.

"Anything above 10 is considered very hard," said Michael Noschang, owner of Cincinnati-based Ohio Valley Pure Water.

Plumbing experts say the harder the water, for example, the more soap you need for cleaning, showers and laundry. Water softeners soften the water by removing minerals such as calcium and magnesium.

"Owning a water softener will save you 80 percent on your soap," Noschang said. "You'll go through just one box compared to five because hard water takes more time to lather. The harder the water, the more soap it takes."

Water softeners also work to eliminate the amount of hard-water scale inside pipes by reducing hard calcium and magnesium that can result in clogs and can corrode water-using appliances, such as dishwashers and toilets. That, in turn, will extend the life of the appliances and save you money. Soft water can also eliminate "soap scum" left behind when cleaning with hard water.

"It makes everything last longer because it breaks down the minerals," said Ernie Vilardo, owner of Cincinnati-based Anderson Hills Plumbing & Supply, Inc. "You also use less soap and less shampoo. It cleans everything better. You know when you go to the car wash and get a spot-free rinse? That's from soft water."

Soft water can also make your skin and hair look fuller and healthier because there are fewer minerals in the water.

"A water softener will help it," Noschang said. "But we do get people that say they spend $3,500 on a water softener because of their dry skin and it doesn't seem to work. There's nothing wrong with the water softener. Just as hard water will dry out skin, so will chlorine (in soft water). In those cases, you can install a carbon filter to remove the chlorine."

Vilardo said water softeners can run about $1,500. Noschang said the price of a water softener can range from $1,000 to $4,000, depending on the size of the softener and brand. You can also rent a water softener for a monthly rate, which includes servicing the unit if there's an issue. But if you're going to stay in your home long term, buying a water softener will be more economical in the long run.

Noschang said a water softener can reduce the cost to heat the water by 20 percent.

If you're looking to buy a water softener, do your homework. Learn how hard the water is in your area and research the products and companies. Work with a reputable company that offers a money-back guarantee and whose installers are certified by the Water Quality Association.

Many companies are selling "salt-free" systems that are designed to condition water by removing mineral deposits, but Noschang said that because of the hardness of the water in Cincinnati, salt-free water conditioners are ineffective. It's important to take a company's claims of what a water softener or a conditioner can – and can't – do with a grain of salt. "It's just like anything else," Noschang said. " You need to know how honest the sales person is being and how much they're going to bend the rules. I've heard of a company selling a water softener to a couple and claimed it could cure cancer."

Angie Hicks is the founder of Angie's List.

What did you think about this article? Send us your feedback.
Activate your account today and get the most from your subscription. Not a subscriber? Get started now.