

Fact or Fiction?

The Facts About Tankless Water Heaters

Tankless, or instantaneous, water heaters are a hot topic. Tankless water heaters are about the size of a briefcase and heat water rapidly as it passes through a heated exchange coil. Proponents of tankless water heaters emphasize several benefits, but you may not be getting the whole story.

CLAIM:

Huge dollar savings

FACTS:

- Most tankless water heater units cost at least twice as much to purchase as standard water heaters.
- Installation costs can be up to 10 times more than standard water heaters.
- Tankless water heaters usually require costly new equipment upgrades for both electric and gas models.
- The operating cost of a tankless unit is less, but the savings is only about \$30 per year for average family usage.
- Tankless water heaters significantly increase demand during peak hours, which in turn can lead to increases in electric rates.
- Tankless water heaters are not eligible for co-op rebates or incentives.

CLAIM:

Last longer

FACTS:

- Tankless water heaters need very pure water or they may fail prematurely due to buildup of mineral deposits.
- Mineral deposits can also reduce water flow and efficiency in tankless units.
- Failure due to mineral deposits is not covered by most tankless warranties.
- Tankless water heaters also contain many specialized parts that should only be serviced by a trained technician. Replacement parts are not readily available and usually must be ordered.

CLAIM:

Endless supply of hot water

FACTS:

- "...Taking a shower and running the dishwasher at the same time can stretch a tankless unit to its limits."*
- "Even the largest ...model cannot supply enough hot water for simultaneous, multiple uses..."*
- "Typically tankless water heaters provide hot water at a rate of 2 to 5 gallons per minute."*
- Standard water heaters have no flow rate limits!

As you can see, the high costs of purchasing, installing and servicing a tankless water heater far outweigh the modest energy savings. And even after that expense, you still may not have all the hot water you need, when you need it!


References:

* U.S. Department of Energy: http://www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your_home/water_heating/index.cfm/mytopic=12820

"What's the Big Deal About Tankless Water Heaters?" White paper by Dr. William Hoover, A.O. Smith Corporate Technology Center.

Tankless Electric Water Heaters, *The rest of the story. Innovations, Summer 2005.*

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