

RV Maintenance Made Easy: Water Heater



How to Upkeep Your RV's Water Heater

Here are a few troubleshooting and maintenance tips to help increase the longevity and efficiency of your RV's water heater.

RV Water Heater Maintenance and Troubleshooting Tips

Your RV's tank-style water heater is one appliance that gets regular use when you're camping. This means that preventative maintenance and regular upkeep is a must to keep this system running smoothly. From regular checkups to DIY troubleshooting, here are a few things you can do to keep your water heater in top shape.

Preventative Maintenance

Most RV water heaters are one of two major brands: Suburban or Atwood/Dometic. Since these water heaters are built differently, your maintenance and upkeep will depend on which brand you have in your rig.

- Suburban water heaters are made of steel and use an anode rod that protects your tank from rust and corrosion through electrolysis. Check the anode rod any time you drain the tank and change it when 50 percent or more of the rod is missing.
- Atwood/Dometic tanks are made of aluminum and have a plastic drain plug, not an anode rod. If this needs replacing, be sure to use an exact replacement part for the repair.
- Visually inspect the outdoor water heater compartment every trip. Wasps, spiders, and other insects are attracted to the smell of the additive in propane. Clear spiderwebs and other debris from this area regularly.
- Over time, calcium will build up inside the tank. Drain and clean your tank at least once per season or more, especially if you're a full-timer.
- To protect the tank and the heating element, never operate the water heater without water in the tank.



Water heater thermostats are typically set at 130 to 140 degrees from the factory. Aftermarket adjustable or lower temperature replacements are available if desired.

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Troubleshooting

- Two of the most common water heater issues include not having hot water run from your faucets or not having water fill your tank. Typically, these are both bypass issues. To solve, confirm that the water bay system or bypass valves (depending on your rig) are in the correct position and allow water to enter and exit the tank without also running through the bypass section.
- If your water heater is powered by both propane and electric, but it's not working from either source, ask yourself the following questions: Is there propane in your tanks, and are the valves open? Is the battery fully charged so that it triggers the ignitor for propane mode? Is your RV plugged into shore power and is the breaker turned on at the pedestal?



Use a water heater tank rinsing tool to clean your tank to help remove additional sediment and extend the life of the water heater.

