Opinion: Know where shut-off valves are

By Tracy Franklin

This is the fourth of a series of articles highlighting emergency preparedness. Use these tools to prepare yourself for an emergency. More information is available in the city's website.

Utility Safety

Natural Gas

Natural gas leaks and explosions are responsible for a significant number of fires following any major emergency event. It is vital that all household members know how to shut off the natural gas.

Preparing to shut off the natural gas:

Locate the shut-off valve. Make sure this valve will turn. To shut off the gas, turn the valve 90 degrees, or one-quarter turn, so that it crosses the pipe.

If your valve is rusted open, do not put WD-40 lubricant on it. It may corrode the O-rings that allow the valve to turn.

Attach a wrench to the meter or to the wall directly behind the meter.

Choose a crescent wrench that is at least 12-inches long.

Adjust it to fit your valve before hanging it behind the meter in case it rusts.

Shutting off the gas after an earthquake or emergency:

Shut off the gas immediately only if you smell the characteristic odor of gas, you hear a hissing sound, and/or you notice the meter dials spinning more rapidly than normal.

Do not use matches, lighters, open flame appliances, or operate any electrical switches until you are sure no gas leaks exist. Sparks from electrical switches could ignite the gas.

If you smell natural gas, immediately get everyone out of and away from the house. Open the windows and doors to provide ventilation. Shut off the gas at the meter.

Water:

Water quickly becomes a precious resource following many emergencies. It is vital that all household members learn how to shut off the water at the main house valve.

Cracked lines may pollute the water supply to our house. It is wise to shut off your water until you hear from the authorities that it is safe for drinking.

The affects of gravity may drain the water in your hot water and toilet tanks unless you trap it in your house by shutting off the main house valve (not the street valve in the cement box at the curb – this valve is extremely difficult to turn and requires a special tool.)

Preparing to shut off water:

Locate the shut-off valve for the water line that enters your house.

Make sure this valve can be completely shut-off. Your valve

may be rusted open, or it may only partially close. Replace it if necessary.

Label this valve with a tag for easy identification, and make sure all household members know where it is located.

Electricity:

Electrical sparks have the potential of igniting natural gas if it is leaking. It is wise to teach all responsible household members where and how to shut off the electricity.

Preparing to shut off electricity:

Locate your electricity circuit box.

Teach all responsible household members how to shut off the electricity to the entire house.

Tracy Franklin is the public information officer for South Lake Tahoe.