

Utility shutoffs – Illustrated

By Telford Dorr

Every owner and resident of a unit in our complex should know where the utility shutoffs for their unit are, so that in case of an emergency they can turn them off. Every unit has three prime utilities: gas, electricity, and water. Unfortunately, these three shutoffs will not generally be located in the same place, but are randomly located around the units.

Gas Shutoff

In unit #7, there is a gas shutoff valve that looks like the picture (right) located either at the front entrance to your unit or on the rear patio. It may be clustered with your neighbor's shutoff, so be sure which is yours. It is operated by turning it 90 degrees with a large adjustable wrench or valve tool. When the flat turning surface is aligned with the pipe, as seen in the picture, the valve is open. When it is aligned so that it is



across the pipe, the valve is closed.

There is a shutoff located at the gas meter (see picture, left.) This shutoff is the only shutoff for those of you in unit #5. The gas meters are clustered either in a utility closet, or along a garage wall. Again, be sure which meter is yours before you operate its valve, otherwise your neighbor may not be too happy with you. The meter should be labeled

with your address. If not, there is a meter number label on its front. Your meter number is printed on your bill. Personally, I would label my meter with my address using a black marker so that I (and emergency personnel) could identify it quickly.

Water Shutoff

Water shutoff valves are generally clustered as shown in the picture (right). Exact configurations vary. At the bottom of the pipe is the main shutoff valve. It is designed to be operated by hand, but usually a wrench or piece of pipe slid over the handle is needed to turn it. When the handle is



aligned along the pipe, the valve is open. When it is perpendicular to the pipe, it is closed. This valve should be cycled periodically (say, once a year) so that it doesn't seize up.

Above the shutoff valve is a hose bib. This is useful for draining the plumbing after the water is shut off.

Above the hose bib is the pressure regulator. This device is intended to limit the maximum water pressure in the plumbing inside your unit. If this device fails, the water pressure could increase to a point where the water heater or washing machine hoses could fail and leak. The water pressure is generally highest at night. This device may be checked by connecting a pressure gauge to the hose bib located on your patio. If the pressure is above the normal 65 to 85 pounds range, the regulator should be checked. These regulators tend to load up with hard water deposits and crud, and fail frequently, so check it once a year. You can purchase a gauge at the hardware store for around \$10, or contact me and I can loan you a pressure gauge, or check your pressure for you.

Finally, above the pressure regulator is a pressure relief valve. This device will open and relieve the water pressure if it gets extremely high. It is intended to protect the plumbing should someone turn off the main water valve but not shut off the water heater. The expanding hot water could cause the plumbing to burst.



Electrical Disconnect

The circuit breaker panel for your unit is generally located inside the master bedroom closet. Individual breakers located within it control the various electrical circuits inside your unit and garage. Somewhere in the circuit breaker box is a pair of 'main' or 'master' disconnect breakers. This pair will shut off all power to your unit.

There is also a master disconnect switch located below your electrical meter. This meter is located in a utility closet along side one of the garages in your complex (see picture, left.) Again, be sure which meter is yours. It should be labeled with your address.

GFCI

Finally, be aware that

there is a special receptacle, or electrical outlet, located in one of your bathrooms. It is known as a GFCI, or ground fault circuit interrupter. It keeps you from accidentally receiving a fatal electrical shock from any appliance (curling iron, hair dryer) plugged into it. What most people don't know is that the outlets in their other bathrooms are also be connected to it. Also, the garage light, receptacle, and door opener are connected to it (as required by code.) If this device trips or fails, you may find that your garage door won't open any more. Weird, but true. There are two buttons located on the device: test, and reset. Pressing the 'test' button should cause the device to trip with a loud click, shutting off the electricity at its outlet. Pressing the 'reset' button should reset the device, turning the power back on. If either of these buttons fail to operate, the GFCI unit should be replaced.

