

# How to Shut-Off Utilities

There is no cost involved in teaching everyone in your home about how & when to turn off the gas, electricity, and water after an earthquake. This can be as simple as clearly marking where the shut-off valves are, and posting instructions close by. Below are some common examples of shut-off valves. Even if you have something different, like a propane tank, the shut-off will be similar. If you cannot find the shut-off valves, or you do not understand the valve system, call your local utility company or tank provider.

Remember, consider shutting off utilities if you can smell gas, smell or see fire, or see damage to, from, or near the utility lines. It is wise to shut off utilities if you are going to leave the home for extended periods of time. This is because of the probability of aftershock.

## BEFORE AN EARTHQUAKE...

- **TEST YOUR GAS VALVE:** Locate and identify your gas meter and main shut-off valve with those persons you believe could and should know how to shut off your gas if necessary. Identify the master shut-off valve.
- Paint the valve bright red. Note: Caution, there may be more than one shut-off on your meter.
- Use the illustrations of gas meter (pg. 18) and main shut-off valves (above) to help you identify yours.
- Using a 12" adjustable, or other appropriate wrench, turn the main valve 1/8 of a turn only to the right or left. (This movement may be difficult at first)
- **CAUTION:** Be careful, do not to turn any valve MORE than 1/8 turn to the right or left when testing. (If you do, pilot lights will very likely go out and it will require a trained person to relight them.)
- After you have moved that valve to ensure that it works, **KEEP THE WRENCH AT THE METER**, use plastic "zip ties" or straps to secure it to your meter.
- If you use an adjustable wrench be sure to store it pre-fit to your valve. That way in case it rusts or corrodes it will still fit. Heavy oil or grease applied to the moving parts of the wrench, before you secure it, will help keep it functional and ready for use. Do not buy any plastic or fiberglass gas wrenches. They become brittle with time.

If the main valve will not turn 1/8 turn, then call the Gas Company immediately to have it fixed or replaced.

## AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE. . .

Turn your gas off at the gas meter under the following conditions:

- If you smell, hear, or even suspect gas is escaping in your damaged or undamaged building(s).
- If your gas water heater or any other gas appliance has been knocked over and/or pulled free from its wall connection.
- If your building has suffered extensive damage, such as large cracks in the walls or in the concrete slab floors, etc. AND you suspect the gas lines may have been damaged.
- If you smell smoke and/or see or suspect fire.
- **NOTE:** If you have none of the above you are probably OK leaving your utilities on.
- **NOTE:** Many gas companies have training programs to teach you how to turn your gas back on. Contact your local company for information.
- **WARNING . . .** If you smell gas don't turn on or off any switches. Don't use any open flame to check for leaks. Don't turn on any battery operated flashlights, unless they are a safety/waterproof light.
- Chemical light sticks are a safe source of light in the event of gas leak.
- **WARNING . . .** It is very dangerous and therefore not recommended that you go searching for gas leaks inside any damaged building.

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- **BE AWARE:** After an earthquake, aftershocks will continue to occur, possibly causing additional damage (or even first damage) to your building(s).
- **REMEMBER:** Do not turn the gas valve back on after an earthquake, unless a qualified person has checked extensively for gas leaks.
- **REMEMBER:** A qualified person (plumber, contractor, or trained homeowner) or gas company employee will have to relight all the pilot lights.

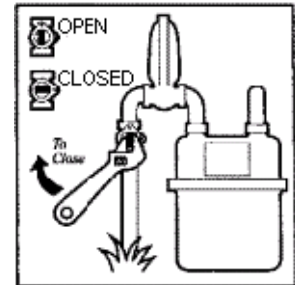
## GAS SHUT-OFF

Locate main gas shut-off (usually outside house) at the gas meter. The valve is usually on a pipe coming out of the ground, going into the gas meter. Turn the valve crosswise to the pipe (see diagram). All the pilot lights in and around your home (stove, furnace, clothes dryer, swimming pool/ spa heater, water heater, etc.) will go out when you turn the valve off. *You will need to have the gas company, or another qualified individual (plumber, contractor, or trained homeowner), relight every pilot when turning the gas back on. Forgetting to relight all the pilot lights could result in a dangerous gas buildup in your home.* Remember, if you don't smell gas or have severe damage to your home you should not have to shut the gas off. It's your decision.

Clear the area around the main gas shut-off valve for quick and easy access in case of emergency.

A wrench (or specialty tool), for turning off the gas, should be attached to a pipe next to the shut-off valve or in another easily accessible location. You may want to paint the shut-off valve with white or fluorescent paint so that it can be located easily in an emergency.

If you are concerned about your ability to turn off the main gas shut-off valve or are unsure if it is in proper working order (indication of rust, etc.) or do not know how to relight your pilot lights, contact your local gas company. They can send a service representative to your house to show you the proper procedure and check the valve and pilot lights to be sure they operate properly.



## AUTOMATIC GAS SHUT-OFF VALVES

Automatic gas shut-off valves are an excellent way to insure that your gas is shut off in the case of a major earthquake. They are recommended by the Fire Department. In many cities in California they are required to be installed when you sell your home or do more than a \$10,000 remodel. With an automatic valve your gas will be off even if you aren't home at the time. Contact your local gas company for more information and installation.

## ELECTRICAL SHUT-OFF

First locate all of your home's electrical panels. **Note:** There may be more than one.

Your house may be equipped with fuses or circuit breakers. If your house has fuses, you will find a knife switch handle or pullout fuse that should be marked "MAIN." If your house has circuit breakers, you may need to open the metal door of the breaker box to reveal the circuit breakers (never remove the metal cover). The main circuit breaker should be clearly marked showing on and off positions.

**Remove all the small fuses or turn off all the small breakers first, then shut off the "main."** If you have any sub-panels adjacent to the main fuse or breaker panel or in other parts of the house, in an emergency be safe and shut them off too. Shorts can sometimes develop that cause a circuit to bypass the breaker or fuse.

## WATER SHUT-OFF

Locate the main water service pipe into your house (probably in the front at the basement level). You will see a gate valve on the pipe. If you know you have leaks after an earthquake, you can shut off all water in your house with this valve. You may wish to paint the valve so it is easy to find in an emergency.

You can shut off all water to your property by finding the water meter box (usually at the street or sidewalk). Open the cover with a long screwdriver or specialty tool. If this box is inaccessible or you cannot find it, call your local water department. Be sure to identify this box and the water valve inside before the need to use them arises.

Inside the water meter box you will see a valve that is similar to the valve on your gas meter. Turn it just the same as your gas valve.

**Note:** All responsible family members should be shown how to turn off utilities in case of emergency. They need to know what the utilities look like in both on and off positions.