

The risk of flexi hoses – Early learning



Imagine that you've closed your centre at about 6pm on a Friday. Unbeknownst to you, later that evening water starts flowing from underneath one of the bathroom sinks. As no one is there to see or stop this, it continues with water inundating the entire building. By the time you're aware of this on Monday morning, the building has suffered extensive water damage to the floors and furniture and mould has started to form.

What is a flexi hose?

Many business and home owners will have little understanding of a serious risk lurking beneath their sinks. Flexible braided hoses, commonly called flexi hoses, are frequently found underneath bathroom or kitchen sinks right across Australia. A flexi hose is a flexible hose with braided or woven stainless steel which have overtime replaced standard copper pipes. They'll usually be used to connect water to an appliance, such as a dishwasher, sink or toilet.

The flexibility in them makes plumbing connections easier in a range of settings. However, it's this flexibility that also creates a very real risk of water damaging your property and disrupting your business if the hose fails or bursts.

What could go wrong?

It's quite simple really. When the stainless steel outer of a flexi hose fails by either corroding or fraying, this allows the inner tubes of the hose to expand to a point of bursting.

How will this impact your centre?

Any building, both commercial and residential, faces the risk of a burst flexi hose. However early learning centres face a higher risk than many other buildings given their high number of toilets and basins, and therefore the high number of flexi hoses.

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The scenario at the beginning of this article highlights the damage which can occur with water potentially inundating the entire building before it is realised and stopped. However, the impact unfortunately doesn't end there.

Guild Insurance has seen many cases where extensive water damage has led to an early learning centre being closed for a period of time, possibly a week. This may be because of the time it takes for the floors to completely dry. Driers can be used to speed up this process, however these are quite noisy and it's difficult to operate a centre while these are being used. There is also the issue of mould building up due to the water damage and this creating an unsafe space for both children and the staff.

There is an unfortunate potential consequence of an early learning centre being unable to operate for a period of time. Several centres have experienced their children attending other centres during a closure and then not returning once the centre is up and running. While insurance can assist with the cost of repairs and lost revenue during a closure, it can't assist with valued clients choosing to not return.

What can you do about this?

Use a qualified plumber – There may be a temptation for some people to consider installing flexi hoses themselves, however the majority of issues with flexi hoses come about due to poor installation. Therefore, always use a qualified plumber to be sure flexi hoses are correctly installed.

Create a maintenance program – flexi hoses should be regularly checked for damage, approximately every 6 months. When undertaking these checks be on the look out for leaks, bulging pipes and fraying or rusting stainless steel. Your plumber may be able to assist you with this process.

Only use quality products – While all flexi hoses have a limited lifespan, some will last longer than others. Your qualified plumber should only be using products which adhere to the WaterMark Certification Scheme and carry the recognised WaterMark logo. While a high cost isn't a guarantee of high quality, be mindful when trying to limit spending as sometimes cheap options will be of a lower quality.

Flood stop valve – there are a few products on the market, usually called flood stop valves or isolation taps, which can be attached to a flexi hose and will stop the flow of water from a burst hose. These are small devices which are relatively cheap yet should be installed by a qualified plumber.

Replacement program – quality flexi hoses are generally thought to have a lifespan of about 5-8 years, however this can vary and some have been known to burst within a few months of installation. It's therefore recommended hoses are replaced approximately every 5 years, unless maintenance checks suggest it should happen sooner. If you've moved into a new premises and you aren't sure of the age of the flexi hoses, consider replacing them all to be on the safe side. This may seem overly cautious, however the time and money spent doing this will be much less than dealing with water damage to your business.

Storage of chemicals nearby – it's very common to store cleaning products in cupboards under sinks, which is where you're also likely to find flexi hoses. It's thought that the chemicals in these cleaning products may contribute to the corrosion of flexi hoses. Therefore, find another safe place to store these products away from your flexi hoses.

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