

# Galvanized Steel Water Pipes

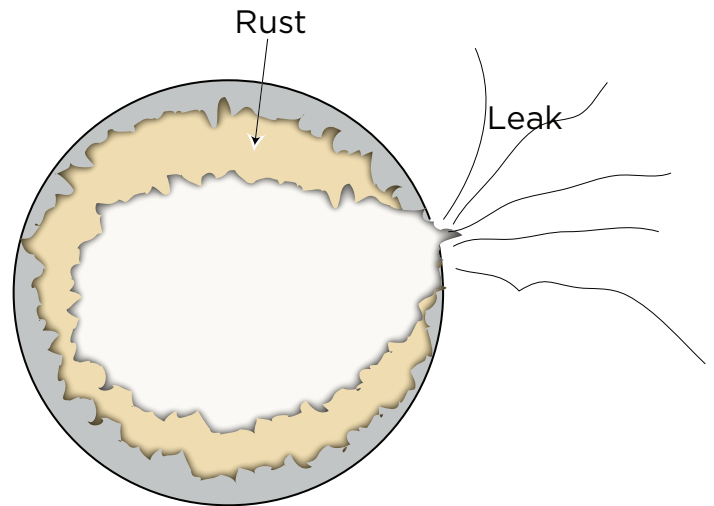
## What is Galvanized Steel Pipe?

Galvanized refers to a zinc coating added to steel pipes to protect them from rust. Galvanized steel was used for residential supply plumbing until around 1950. Although it was considered an effective resistant to corrosion at the time, it proved to have a limited service life of approximately 50 years. Over time, water passing through the pipes literally consumes the zinc. Once the zinc is gone, the exposed steel will then start to rust.

## The Problems

Galvanized steel pipe has not been used in residential homes since around 1950. Any galvanized steel found in homes today, therefore, will generally be well past its shelf date. If you have galvanized steel pipes, consider replacing them, especially since rust is not the only problem you will face. Other problems include:

- **Poor water flow** – galvanized steel pipe rusts from the inside out, diminishing the effective cross-sectional area. Any pipe found today will likely have an interior comprised mostly of rust.
- **Rust in the water** – you may see rust in the water when you first turn on the taps. It will, however, quickly clear as you run the water, but unsightly stains may develop on plumbing fixtures.
- **Leaks** – the pipe eventually rusts right through, usually at the threaded joints where the steel is the thinnest, causing leaks.
- **Home insurance** – many insurance companies will not insure homes with galvanized steel pipe because of the risk of major leaks.



## Recognizing Galvanized Steel Pipe

- A silvery grey color indicates weathered galvanized steel pipe
- The pipe connections are often threaded
- A magnet will stick to galvanized steel pipe but not to copper, lead, or plastic
- The flow from the hot tap is distinctly different than the flow from the cold
- Rust stains can be found near the drain in a sink

Recognizing galvanized steel is easy, but finding it can be a challenge. If the plumbing in your home has been upgraded at some point, galvanized steel pipe may be located in areas difficult and/or disruptive to access. For instance, a past upgrade might have involved replacing the horizontal runs of pipe, which tend to corrode faster than the vertical runs (risers), leaving the latter, therefore, in place. Risers inside walls are often difficult or impossible to see. Furthermore, hot water pipes often get replaced while cold are left behind since the hot corrode faster than the cold. Galvanized steel pipes, therefore, tend to go undetected until a leak appears, or until the walls are opened during a renovation.

Although galvanized steel does not present a health hazard, you should still consider replacing it since you run the risk of major leaks that may cause serious damage to your house, resulting in expensive repairs. Replacement will also clear up minor problems, such as poor water flow. If you find galvanized steel in your home, contact a plumber to have it replaced. Do not wait for a leak!

