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ADVICE TO OCCUPANTS REGARDING WATER HAMMER NOISES IN HOME UNITS/TOWNHOUSES

Living in a home unit/townhouse can be uncomfortable if there is unwanted noise caused by the use of the water pipe system. Finding the cause of the noise can be a long process of elimination and as an occupant you play an important role.

It is commonly thought the cause of the water noise is loose water pipes. However the vibration of loose pipes is a symptom of the problem but not usually the cause.

Water Hammer is often recognised by a banging or thumping in water pipes due to a tap or valve being shut off. The noise is caused by an instantaneous high-pressure surge, which acts like a tiny explosion inside the pipe. This often rattles and vibrates the pipes. The noise can occur anywhere in the water pipes and is often away from the tap or valve that caused it.

The most common causes of Water Hammer noises are tap washers and valves:

1. Normal taps like basin or shower hot and cold taps: The washer usually simply needs replacing and the tap needs a service to ensure it operates smoothly.
2. Isolation stop taps such as hot water heater taps, main cold water taps, dish washer taps, washing machine taps, mixer taps etc: The tap washer is loose inside the tap when it is in the on position. The pressure surge causes the washer to bang against the valve seat causing more pressure surges and banging pipes. The washer may need replacing with a softer type or a water hammer reducing washer, and the tap may require a service.
3. Non-return valves: usually need replacing if causing water hammer.
4. Appliances like washing machines, dishwashers, fridge icemakers etc have solenoid valves which can operate suddenly causing a violent bang in the pipes. It may be necessary to install a water hammer arrester valve on the appliance taps to help absorb the pressure surge.

Tracing the source of the noise is often difficult and the following information will help:

1. Is the noise from your unit?
When you hear the noise are any taps or appliances in your unit operating?
Is it when hot or cold is used?
Try one by one, shutting off appliance stop taps whilst the noise is occurring.
Which tap stops the noise?

Shut off the hot water stop tap and operate the cold taps – does the noise occur?

2. If the noise is not from your unit::

Firstly talk to other residents to see if they are experiencing a similar problem. If one or more concerned residents can try and trace it, or even narrow down the possibilities, it is very helpful information to the plumber.

Then go through the building while the noise is occurring and try and trace which unit or common area the noise is from and which tap is operating at the time.

It may help to put up a notice in common areas asking if anyone can help trace the problem.

For example;

*WE ARE HAVING TROUBLE WITH WATER HAMMER NOISES IN THE BUILDING.
WE NEED HELP FROM RESIDENTS TO TRY AND LOCATE WHAT TAP IS BEING
USED WHEN THE WATER HAMMER NOISE IS HEARD.
IF YOU CAN HELP IN ANY WAY PLEASE CONTACT _____*

As you can imagine the process could take some time, often weeks if it is elusive. A plumber can be engaged to do this however it can be very time consuming and the more information you can provide them with the quicker the problem will be resolved.

You should also be aware that there can often be more than one source of the noise or another tap could start to cause the noise at anytime.

Normally costs involved in the repair of taps and washers in units are not Owners Corporation responsibility. Only repairs to the main cold water stop tap are Owners Corporation responsibility (and hot water stop taps if it is a common hot water system).

Therefore if you are aware of any taps or valves within your unit causing water hammer you should repair them as soon as possible as the noise may be affecting other units and you may be liable for the costs involved in searching for the noise if another unit reports the problem.

Other possible causes of water noise within buildings are pump operations such as circulation pumps and pressure pumps, garden watering system solenoid valves & inlet ball float valves on toilets, cooling towers & gravity heaters. It may be that the water pressure is simply too high and a pressure reduction valve may be required.

Unwanted noise associated with the water pipes can make home unit living very uncomfortable. However with help from residents, your plumber can help you minimise the problems.