

ASK THE BUILDER

Question: My hot water heater is going out and I was looking into a tankless hot water heater, are they reliable?

Answer: During a time of skyrocketing natural gas costs and a conscious effort by all to conserve energy, a tankless hot water heater is a viable option that deserves serious consideration. Water heaters account for 20% or more of an average households energy expenditures, according to the US Department of Energy. We spend any where from \$200 to \$450 per year in gas or electricity for the typical water storage heater. Tankless water heaters can save you anywhere from 25% to 50%. However every application can be different and you need to look at several aspects of the change over to see if it makes sense for you. First of all, let me give you a little background about tankless water heaters.

A tankless water heater operates by heating water directly without having to use a storage tank. When you turn on a hot water faucet, cold water travels through a pipe to the unit. The flow of the water activates a heating element that heats the water instantaneously and delivers a constant supply of hot water set to the desired temperature. Therefore you only heat water as you need it. They re also much smaller and take up less space. A tankless unit runs about 16" W by 24" L by 9"D. They last about 20 years compared to a storage tank water heater that lasts anywhere from 6 to 12 years.

Tankless water heaters have been around for nearly 30 years in Europe and Japan. So the technology is not new. They have been in the US for nearly 20 years. In recent years with Americans continuously becoming more sensitive to energy conservation and lower production of green house gasses, the demand has grown. More manufacturers are out there and the prices are becoming more reasonable. In fact The Gas Company is presently offering a \$200 rebate. (See web site at www.socalgas.com/twh. Presently a tankless water heater costs around \$1,200.

You can also look at using multiple locations for units. Place the units where they are needed. Like in a laundry room or under a sink. That way the water is heated instantly right at the location where you need it. Circulating pumps can also be connected to tankless water heaters as well. But that would reduce the affect of using a tankless heater

If you do plan on switching over to a tankless, I strongly recommend using a licensed contractor who is knowledgeable about the installation of tankless water heaters. Proper installation is the key to making sure they work correctly

So to answer your question, yes they are reliable. In addition, if you run the numbers you can get your money back for the added expense of the tankless water heater You will also save energy, reduce greenhouse gasses and never run out of hot water. So its definitely worth a serious look.

Who we are: Ask the Builders is written by the four partners of Touchstone Builders. They have over 30 years of experience in the building industry.