

The Step-By-Step Water Softener Maintenance Checklist

Before You Start

Here are a few essential tools and supplies you'll need:

Tools

- Long scrub brush or sponge
- A bucket (to remove brine tank water)
- A hose
- Manufacturer's manual (for specific instructions)
- A few towels or rags
- A broom (to check for salt bridges)

Salt

Evaporated, pellet, or block salt is a good match for most commercial water softeners. The type of salt you choose usually depends on your personal preference and your system's specifications.

Other Supplies

- Bleach: Select manufacturers permit the use of diluted bleach to clean the brine tank, but always check the manual before using bleach.
- Resin cleaner: Choose high-quality specialized products that are designed to remove iron buildup from resin beds.

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Check Salt Levels

The first and most important step is to check your system's salt levels. For most water softeners, your salt is found in the brine tank, which is where the sodium ions "swap" with magnesium and calcium ions, a process known as ion exchange. If salt levels are low, water softener systems won't have what they need to properly perform their process, resulting in hard water. Here's how to check the salt levels:

1. Locate where the brine tank is and open it.
2. Salt pellets need to be high enough to cover visible water in the tank.
3. If it's running low, add fresh salt (it should reach about halfway), being careful not to overfill it, as this can lead to several problems.
4. Before refilling, get rid of encrusted salt that sticks to the side of the brine tank.

Clean Your Brine Tank*

Over extended periods of time, salt impurities can build up in your brine tank, forming clumps or sludge that negatively affects your softener's regeneration process. You can clean your brine tank on your own, but having an expert there to help can also be beneficial. Here's how to properly clean your brine tank:

1. Prepare a place like a dugout pit to dump the brine from the tank outside, and set the softener system to bypass mode.
2. Unplug the water softener and disconnect the brine tank.
3. Take the brine tank outside and dump the contents into the makeshift dugout pit.
4. After it's empty, disassemble and clean the brine tank and valve:
 - o Fill your bucket with dish detergent and cold water
 - o Remove and clean the salt plate in the bucket
 - o Use the long scrub brush to clean the inside of the brine tank
 - o Mix a ¼ cup of bleach with 2–3 gallons of cold water and let the mixture sit in the tank for about 15 minutes or more
 - o Scrub the inside of the tank once more, empty the bleach water, and rinse it with clean water
 - o Wipe the tank and valve dry before reassembling
5. Reconnect the brine tank to the softener system, rejoining all the lines to the equipment and drain
6. Take the system out of bypass mode and add five gallons of water and two 50-lb bags of salt to the tank. Double-check the system's manual to ensure you're adding the proper amount of water and salt.
7. Let the salt sit in the water for at least two hours and start a regeneration cycle

**This only needs to be done once a year unless your water has high levels of iron or sediment. In that case, it may need to be cleaned more often.*

Inspect for Salt Bridges

Salt bridges are hard crust structures that form in your brine tank, similar to a sheet of ice that floats on the surface of water. If you have salt bridges, your water softener system can't regenerate accurately. Here's how to check for and eliminate salt bridges from your water softener equipment:

1. Push a broom or other rigid tool straight down into the salt of the brine tank. If it hits something hard that's not at the bottom or on the sides of the tank, your equipment has a salt bridge.
2. Using the broom's handle, gently break up the salt bridge or any crust you find.
3. Remove the chunks that break off.

Replace Your Water Softener Resin

Resin is an essential component of your water softener's operation as it allows the ion exchange process to take place. Although resin is often made to last the duration of your equipment's lifetime (10–15 years), high levels of iron and chlorine can break down the resin faster than what's expected.

You'll be able to tell if you need to replace the resin bed if your water softener consumes salt at the regular rate but doesn't produce enough soft water. Small particles in your water, known as are another indication that the resin is



starting to break down, and it's a sign that it's time for resin replacement. Here's how to replace your water softener's resin:

1. Review your owner's manual to determine the amount of resin you'll need.
2. Place the system in bypass and unplug the power cord.
3. Disconnect the plumbing, remove the control head, and lay the softener tank on its side.
4. Rinse out the old resin using a hose. If your system uses a layer of gravel at the bottom, save the old gravel.
5. Stand the tank upright, covering the opening in the product tube, and refill the gravel until it covers the screen.
6. Fill the tank about halfway with new resin and uncover the product tube.
7. Reattach the control head and reconnect the plumbing.
8. Place the water softener back into service mode and start a manual regeneration.
9. Test the water for the softness level.

Clean the Resin Tank*

A thorough cleaning also benefits the resin tank itself. This helps remove debris, sediment, or contaminants that have built up in the tank and impacted its effectiveness. You'll need to use a water softener cleaner that's safe for your equipment. Here's how you can clean your resin tank:

1. Pour the cleaner into the brine tank, ensuring you follow the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Manually regenerate the system to flush out the old resin beads and clean the tank.
3. Run a manual regeneration cycle.
4. Let the system complete a full cycle.

**This only needs to be done about once or twice a year.*

Analyze the Valves & Settings

Take some time to inspect your system's main components, ensuring everything is operating correctly. Here's how to check your water softener system:

1. Check for leaks around all connections
2. Make sure the valves turn smoothly
3. Double-check your timer settings
4. Ensure hardness settings match your water supply
5. Listen for unusual sounds during regeneration

Flush the System

To finish your maintenance checkup, a good practice is to flush the entire system with clean water. This removes any leftover residual cleaner and makes certain everything is working correctly.

