

HOW TO REPLACE A WAX RING



With the absence of any water visible around the toilet in the bathroom, and with the water leaking through or staining the ceiling below only after a toilet is flushed, the problem is most often caused by a leaking wax seal between the toilet and the floor. But that's not to say it can't be caused by other leaks. I recently heard of a problem that sounded like a leaking wax seal, but it turned out to be a pin-hole in the drain pipe below the toilet. You still have to start with the assumption that it is the wax seal.

Replacing a wax ring is not technically difficult, but the job is awkward, can be messy and the toilet is heavy. It is not a job for a person with a bad back either. The parts are inexpensive, but it's labor intensive. This is usually one of those cut-and-dried plumbing jobs that permits you to do a telephone price comparison among your local plumbers. What is the standard cost to replace a wax ring??? However, if you run into rotten sub-flooring, you've also got a carpentry project, and it may complicate replacing the wax ring. Don't delay this replacement; replacing the subflooring is expensive.

If you decide to do this yourself or have a friend who can help you, start by buying a new wax ring. There are two types: one has a plastic horn and the other type is just a wax ring. Some professional plumbers do not like the type with the horn, because the horn will sometimes get caught on a toilet auger. In my experience the type with the horn has solved problems with leaks that were difficult to identify. In fact, there are times when it is necessary to use both a plain ring and a ring with the horn. Also I would plan on replacing the water supply line with a newer style "flexible" supply that comes with both end nuts in place, and mounting bolts so buy a set of new bolts. If you separate the tank and bowl, you should also buy new bolts, a new gasket and washers to re-connect the tank and bowl.

Protect any floor covering around the toilet, either remove it or cover with old towels. You will get water on the floor... count on it. If you have to turn the water supply off at the main house shutoff, fill two buckets with water. One bucket of cold water to use to drain the bowl (see below) and the other with hot water to clean the floor under the toilet and the bottom of the toilet.

Start by turning the water supply off. Disconnect the supply line to the tank (covered under the lessons on replacing flush valves). Flush the toilet, hold the

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handle down to allow as much water as possible to drain from the tank. Dump the bucket of cold water into the toilet bowl all at one time. This will leave you with just a little water in the bottom of the bowl; sponge it up.

Next you have to decide whether or not to separate the tank from the bowl. A professional plumber will probably work with the two pieces together, but it's tricky and awkward. There are usually two or three bolts holding the tank and bowl together. Use penetrating lubricant (LPS-1 or WD-40) on the nuts under the tank. Use a large screwdriver on the head of the bolt inside the tank while you turn the nut under the tank with an adjustable wrench.

Pry up the caps that cover the bolts that hold the toilet to the floor and remove the bolts. Use a penetrating lubricant on the bolts; as a last resort, you may have to use a hack saw to cut the bolts off. **BOLTS WITH A HAMMER!** Once the nuts are loose, rock the bowl from side to side to break it free from the old wax ring. Lift the toilet up and off the bolts. Turn it on its side and examine the old ring; you can sometimes see where and why the ring leaked. While you prepare the toilet for reinstallation, stuff an old towel into the drain opening to prevent sewer gases from permeating the bathroom.

Clean off the old wax from the base of the bowl and from the flange; clean the floor and the base of the toilet thoroughly; alcohol or mineral spirits work pretty good. To make a good seal, both the flange and the bowl should be clean. Press the new wax ring evenly down over the hole in the base of the toilet. Insert the new mounting bolts into the slots in the flange and turn 1/4 turn.

The next step is the tricky part. You have to lower the bowl down over the bolts evenly so that the toilet remains level. It helps to have someone on the floor beside the toilet to guide you down over the bolts, because it's hard to see what you are doing. Mike in New Orleans e-mailed me the following suggestion for making this job much easier. Stand a plastic soda straw over each bolt then lower the toilet over the straws. The straws act as guides and help prevent damage to the wax ring. Tighten the nuts to the bolts by hand; then use a wrench, but be careful not to over tighten.... you can crack the toilet. Reattach the tank (if you removed it) and water supply.