Softener Emergency & Bypass Help

Your softener is leaking, running, or scaring you. Start here. This page exists because of something we see in almost every house: nobody ever showed the owner how their softener works. So here's the most important part, free: how to take your softener out of the fight in about sixty seconds.

Water everywhere? Do this first (the 2 a.m. script)

1. Bypass first. Find the bypass valve (next section shows you where). Put the softener in bypass. The leak at the softener stops mattering, and your house still has water.
2. If water is still coming, main shutoff second. Every house has a main water shutoff — usually where the water line enters the house, or at the meter. Turn it.
3. Then call somebody. If it's our unit, call us: (727) 342-0091. If it's not our unit, this sheet still just saved your floor.

Where is the bypass valve?

On the back of the control head — the box on top of the tank where the pipes connect. Follow the two water pipes into the unit; the bypass lives right where they land. It comes in these common shapes around here:

- Two handles (Clack valves, the ones we install): two red arrow handles. The arrows point the way the water flows — inlet arrow into the valve, outlet arrow out to the house = service. Turn both until the arrow tips point at each other = bypass.
- One knob or lever (many Fleck valves): on the metal bypass, swing the lever until its arrow points at BYPASS, stamped right into the body. (Plastic Fleck bypasses with two small handles or two knobs exist too — follow the markings on yours.)
- Two flat bars (Autotrol, Series 256 bypass): turn both bars together — “Not in Bypass” (bars vertical) is service, “In Bypass” (bars horizontal) is bypass.
- One round handwheel (Hankscraft ceramic-disc valves, REV4 and REV 2.5): turn it slowly between service and bypass. Ceramic is the current style.
- Push-pull knob (some Hankscraft systems, part 41204 — older units): the knob slides in and out, nothing turns. Its service direction is flagged as contested until it's verified on a real unit — check the labeled positions on your unit before you go by any one-liner, including this one.
- Push knob (Culligan and some others): push it in for bypass, pull it back out for service.
- Three plain valves in the pipes (older installs): close the two outside valves (handles across the pipe), open the middle one (handle along the pipe).

Stiff? They get stiff when nobody touches them for years — which is exactly the problem. Open a faucet nearby to drop the pressure and try again. Don't force it with a wrench; a cracked bypass turns a small problem into a big one. Call us instead.

Which way is bypass? Open or closed?

Short version: Service = water goes through the softener (soft water). Bypass = water skips the softener (hard water, but the house has water and the unit is isolated). Day to day, your softener should sit in service. Bypass is for leaks, repairs, vacations, and filling a pool without running it all through the

softener. The number one mix-up we find in people's garages: a softener that's been sitting in bypass for months, doing nothing, while the owner wonders why the water feels hard again. If you just moved in, check this first — it costs nothing and it might be your whole problem.

How do I turn off a water softener that's leaking?

Bypass it (above). Unplugging it is optional — the bypass is what stops the water; the plug only stops the motor and the clock. If it's leaking from the drain line or running water down the drain nonstop, bypass still works: with the unit isolated, the draining stops once the pressure in the tank settles. Then get it looked at — a softener that won't stop running is burning water and salt every hour it sits there.

My softener won't stop running / keeps regenerating. What now?

Bypass it so it stops costing you water, then it needs a look. Common causes we find: a stuck piston or seal in the control head, a clock or timer that's lost its mind after a power outage, or settings that got bumped. None of those get better on their own, and all of them are cheaper to fix this week than after a month of water bills.

The power went out. Do I have to reset my softener?

Usually just the clock. If the time of day is wrong, the softener regenerates at the wrong hour — sometimes the middle of your morning shower. Reset the time of day and check the regeneration time is still 2 a.m. (or whenever nobody's using water). After a big storm outage, this is the single most common call we get. Your valve's clock steps are in its quick guide — all five are in the Print & Save library at aquapro.services/downloads/.

Nobody ever taught you your softener? That's the actual problem.

About nine out of ten owners we meet were never shown the bypass, the clock, or the salt. That's not an accident — untaught customers generate service calls. We'd rather have your referral. So:

- Every softener we install comes with a lesson. Before we leave, you run the bypass yourself, set the clock, and know what the salt's doing — about twenty minutes, your hands on it, plus a settings card at your unit.
- Not our install? We teach those too. The Know Your System house call — $149: we come out, walk your exact unit (Fleck, Clack, Culligan, RainSoft, Kinetico, big-box brands), teach you the bypass, the clock, the hardness setting, and what normal looks and sounds like, and leave your settings written on a card at the unit. If that visit turns into a rebuild or a new system, the $149 comes off the job. It is not credited toward an ordinary service call.
- Want to know what's in your water first? Free 20-minute test at your tap. Clearwater water runs about 14 grains hard. The test tells you what yours is doing, and then you decide.