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## APPLIANCE DOCTOR

# Keep burner elements clean



JOE  
GAGNON

I have met thousands of consumers who have replaced the burners on the top of their range or the elements inside their ovens. Many of these folks have told me of the frightening experience that occurred when the element failed.

They've described explosions that sent flame and hot molten metal flying in all directions, unusual popping sounds or a hole shot into the bottom of a pot that caused a mess all over the top of the stove. I've even met a woman who had a burn mark on her eyebrow and several marks on her arm caused by a burner element on her electric range. In most cases, these failures of components could have been prevented.

As a young man I would watch my father make a natural stove in the sandy beach in front of our summer home. He would dig a hole three feet by three feet in the sand and build a fire inside this hole. Before long the sand would begin to boil and he would place a large,

cast-iron pot with navy pea beans and chicken legs mixed together inside this large vessel. This secret family recipe would sit in this hole for hours while he continually kept the fire going on top of it. He did this many, many times using the principle of boiling sand. My family still speaks of the great taste of food that was prepared using this prehistoric method. Let me explain how we are still using sand today and how it can create an explosion.

When the burners and elements are made for your stove, there is a small, thin wire run through the burner and element that is encased with sand. When the wire is provided with electricity, the sand begins to boil and the part can become red-hot. During the period of cooking we sometimes have a spillage of a food item that has an acid base to it. If so, it is important to clean the affected area as soon as feasible. Without cleaning, what occurs is a pitting action on the burner or element, much like the rust forming on the chrome bumper of a car. Eventually, the pitting action will eat through the burner or element until it gets through to the boiling sand. When this happens, atmospheric air

comes in contact with the boiling sand and an explosion takes place that isn't loud but is certainly very frightening to anyone who observes this. Sparks can fly along with pieces of the hot metal and cause a severe burn to someone nearby.

Many of the owner's manuals with ranges inform us never to use a product with an acid base to clean our ovens unless we cover the elements. Use regular household tinfoil to place over the elements and then make sure to remove it when done cleaning. A product I enjoy using around major appliances when cleaning is called Bon Ami. It's available at Damman Hardware and comes in a bar form that lasts forever. As in the words of my French father, I hope this column makes a bon ami out of you.

Joe Gagnon, the Appliance Doctor, will answer your questions about maintaining and repairing large appliances. Gagnon is president of Carmack Appliances in Garden City and does a weekly radio program on WJR-AM. He is author of "First Aid from the Appliance Doctor," available at area bookstores.

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