

HOME WORK

Companies offer rebates to consumers, but it is little relief

APPLIANCE DOCTOR

I wrote a column a year ago on the defective switch in General Electric and Hotpoint dishwashers produced between April 1983 and January 1989. The U.S. Product Safety Commission confirmed that some 60 fires resulted from this defective "recall" on this product.

I argued that this recall was not even close to being an actual one because GE was not going to come to a home and repair the dishwashers. All that they were doing was offering customers a rebate on the purchase of a new dishwasher, which amounted to the installation cost of a new dishwasher.

How could anyone call this a recall? I was disgusted with the injustice of what was happening and angered by the position of the U.S. Product Safety Commission. How could a manufacturer make 3.1 million dishwashers which have the potential of catching fire and killing someone, and not have to repair the mistake?

On Dec. 25, "Good Morning America" reported a reversal by the U.S. Product Safety Commission, which stated that General Electric must now repair the defective dishwashers.

You probably think of this as a victory for the Appliance Doctor, but I don't look at it that way. The word "recall" has been used several times in today's column, but that person didn't do a darn thing for homeowners who had a fire in their homes as a result of this defective dishwasher, suffered injury or death from a fire, paid for fire damage or purchased a new dishwasher out of their pockets.

Another 50 dishwashers caught fire since this story first appeared a year ago. What about them? ABC reported that there are still a few hundred thousand of these dishwashers in American homes. What about them? Why did the Product Safety Commission not issue a true recall when the problem was discovered? How long did General Electric know about this existing problem? Service repairmen have worked on these dishwashers since the units were built in 1983. Don't try to tell me that a manufacturer doesn't know the ratio of service calls on a particular part — they sell the part.

I am not the important part of this story, the American consumer is — the person who spends their hard-earned dollars and expects a fair shake for their money. They expect a product to do the job, expect it to have a reasonable lifespan and don't expect these everyday products to catch fire. They expect producers to be anything but perfect, but in that kind of a case, consumers expect to know what is wrong with a product. Maybe the recent tire recall taught manufacturers a lesson and maybe not. The talk of putting corporate heads in prison for knowing of faulty products might be the real cure for not caring enough about the most important person — you!

General Electric and Hotpoint dishwashers that need repair were produced between April 1983 and January 1989. Model numbers are GSD500D, GSD500G, GSD540, HDA467, HDA 477 and HDA487.

Joe Gagnon can be heard on *NewsTalk 760, WJR-AM*, every Saturday and Sunday mornings. He is a past president of The Society of Consumer Professionals. His second book, "The Words and Wisdom of The Appliance Doctor" is available in book stores. His phone number is (313) 873-8789.

Do you have a question for the Appliance Doctor? Contact him care of Ken Abramczyk, At Home Editor, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150 or e-mail kabramczyk@aol.com. net. Look for Gagnon's suggestions in a future Appliance Doctor column.

Web site assists with searches for your appliance repair parts

PRNewswire — Women are increasingly picking up hammers and donning safety glasses to tackle home improvement projects. They can find everything they need online.

Pat Shaw of Harvard, Mass., discovered RepairClinic.com of Canton, Mich., on a search engine when she needed a replacement igniter assembly for her stove.

What she couldn't get from local appliance parts stores she found at www.RepairClinic.com.

"I tried calling an appliance store but they never called back," said Shaw. "Then I stepped into an appliance parts store but was turned away because I didn't have a part number." After these two fruitless efforts, Shaw turned to the Internet.

Shaw was pleased to see RepairClinic.com had everything she needed. She was able to see a photo of the part online so she was certain she was ordering the correct one.

"After running an appliance repair service for more than 10 years, I found many customers, like Ms. Shaw, were willing to fix their own appliances but didn't know where to go for parts or repair help," said Chris Hall, president of RepairClinic.com. RepairClinic.com offers overnight shipping of parts for all major appliance manufacturers. Web site visitors can also e-mail repair questions to the site's online RepairClinic.

"I get a great deal of satisfaction fixing things myself. This time, thanks to RepairClinic.com, I saved at least \$100 by avoiding a service call fee," added Shaw. "How I wish I had visited the site when my dryer stopped working a few months ago."

Shaw, like many women on the information superhighway, appreciates the convenience of ordering products online as it saves hours of calling and driving around looking for just the right "thingamajig."

Women made nearly 38 percent of all do-it-yourself purchases last year, according to the American Hardware Manufacturers Association. And, a recent study by Modia Metrix found that women now make up 50.4 percent of the U.S. Web audience.

RepairClinic.com is an online source for home appliance parts and accessories. Customers can visit www.RepairClinic.com or call a customer service representative at 800-269-2609 for help with all their appliance needs. The company, founded in March 1999, applies the latest in Internet, e-commerce and warehouse technology to the traditional market of appliance repair parts.

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Power rollers help homeowners

What color would you paint the room of your dreams?

This question has some people thinking of trendy colors like robin's egg blue or wasabi green, while those with more conservative tastes would be dreaming of the perfect shade of cream.

Although choosing what color to decorate your room with is a key part of the redecorating process, many homeowners are primarily concerned with the time and energy it takes to complete the painting job.

Power rollers can help you apply your selected paint color twice as fast as manual rollers. They provide a continuous, even flow of paint and extend the user's reach to minimize bending and stretching. They also reduce or eliminate trips to the paint can and eliminate the need for messy paint trays.

Powered rollers come in a variety of styles with prices ranging from \$25 to \$120. The basic models look much like a traditional manual roller, but have an extended handle that holds the paint as it's "fed" to the roller.

The user controls the paint flow by pumping the handle or pushing a trigger. Battery-powered models feature a self-feeding roller, and a portable paint container with a pump that feeds the paint through a flexible hose to the roller. The top-of-the-line electric models pump paint directly from the paint can. In addition, there is a wide variety of accessories to choose from, including a trim pad.

PaintMate and StainMate, two basic models from Wagner Spray Tech, cost as little as \$25. They feature Wagner's innovative Power Trigger System, which can apply oil and latex paints to an 8-foot by 8-foot section in one fill, saving users up to seven trips to the paint tray. The built-in extension allows users to reach an 8-foot-high ceiling without a ladder.

Wagner also offers two battery-operated Power Rollers with prices ranging from \$60 to \$80. Both models have a 9-inch self-feeding roller. The 929 model has a 1-gallon paint container, a 6-foot extension hose, and can paint 20 rooms on one set of batteries. The 949 model has a 1.2-gallon paint container, an 8-foot extension hose, and can paint up to 30 rooms on one set of batteries.

Wagner's electric Power Roller costs around \$100 and can apply up to one gallon of paint in 15 minutes. The paint is fed from the paint can through a 16-foot extension hose to the roller.

For more information on Wagner Spray Tech's power roller products, call 1-800-328-8261 or visit the company's Web site at www.wagner-spraytech.com.

HOME IMPROVEMENT CALENDAR

■ The Home Depot presents free "how-to" clinics every week for do-it-yourselfers. You can learn all about those projects you put off last summer, now that the winter snows have arrived.

The clinics last approximately 30 to 45 minutes each and are taught by experienced Home Depot associates who cover step-by-step instructions on how to tackle a variety of home improvement projects. For more information about the clinics, contact your local Home Depot store.

Scheduled in January are "Organizing Your Home Closets," 10 a.m. Saturdays and Sundays; "How to Install Pergo Flooring," 11 a.m. Saturdays and Sundays; "How to Install Ceramic Tile," 2 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; "How to Hang Interior Doors," 3 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays; "Insulating Your Home," 7 p.m. Tuesdays; and "Audio/Video Hook-up," 7 p.m. Thursdays.

The Home Depot University (HDU) is a series of longer, more in-depth clinics on home improvement.

The HDU topic for January is bathrooms. Call your local Home Depot store for times.

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