

HOME WORK

Appliance repair industry needs more oversight

APPLIANCE DOCTOR



JOE GAGNON

I'm working with our state senators in trying to get the Appliance Repair Act passed into law. Here's why. Keep in mind that work in other occupational fields fall under some sort of guidelines except the appliance repair business. Do you know that the technician entering your home does not have any legal responsibility to give you the old part he or she replaced on your refrigerator?

I remember a television exposé when a reporter insisted that he get the old part removed from the refrigerator. The service technician under the eye of the hidden camera told the supposed homeowner repeatedly that if he wanted the old part, they would have to pay an extra \$30.

In the past 15 years, I've

worked with consumer fraud investigators in setting up these situations to show what some appliance service companies do to consumers. Often the stories are very shameful, but they also report that not all service companies act the same way. Most service companies are honest and more than reasonable. They change a part only when it is defective and they give you the old part before they leave your house.

Those who don't may have their own reason for not giving you the old part.

The service person doesn't want you to keep an old part in case you find a way to check out the part and see that it works just fine. If that were to happen, he certainly has done something which is illegal and he could be charged under the Michigan Consumer Protection Act. If he intentionally tampered with old part so that you could not effectively check it out, the same would apply.

How do you know that the new motor he installed in your refrigerator is a new one? Maybe the motor he's using on your refrig-

erator came from a previous call that day where he changed one that wasn't defective. By the way, that's against the law as well.

A service technician may have a labor rate of \$300 to \$500 per hour. If you knew that, would you be willing to use that company? You may never know the labor rate of a particular service company unless company employees break it down in writing. Some companies hide it so well in the way they write up an invoice, you as a consumer will never know.

Imagine a service technician, hired off the street with no factory training, can charge up to \$500 per hour in labor. It has happened to many of you who are now reading this column and you didn't realize it.

If the Appliance Repair Act went into effect, I believe it would help consumers better understand how much they are charged for service. I hope someday to find a way to make sure that consumers are paying an honest repair bill, until then, you have to be a smart homeowner. Stay tuned.

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Repairing sprinkler system's supply line

ASK DAD



HARRY JACHYM

Underground irrigation systems can apply lines are normally buried only a few inches under the surface, sometimes as little as 6 inches. Garden work, winter freezes and

thaws or a stake driven to hold a holiday decoration in the wrong spot of the yard can damage the lines. (I know about that last one firsthand.) Fortunately, it's not too difficult to repair these lines.

You'll need a shovel, a hand saw, screwdrivers, a blowtorch or other heat source (even a hair dryer will work in a pinch), an insert coupler and two hose clamps that fit your specific lines. (Residential supply lines are often 3/4 inch in diameter,

but can be 1/2- or 1-inch. If you're not sure of the size of your lines, you'll find out when you dig.)

You should know specifically where your sprinkler lines are located and the locations of gas and electrical lines before you start shoveling.

Dig only what's necessary to repair the sprinkler lines and to work comfortably. The more you dig now, the harder the lawn repair will be later. If the damage isn't obvious, turn on the water to pinpoint the problem.

Using the handsaw, cut through the line at the damaged area.

Slip a hose clamp over each cut end. Gently heat the supply lines with the torch and insert the coupler into both cut ends. Use care not to melt the plastic. When the coupler has rejoined the line together, slide the hose clamps to the coupler and tighten.

Anytime there is a break in an underground supply line, you'll

likely find grit has plugged the heads. It's a good idea to dig a little soil from around the last sprinkler head in the zone and remove that sprinkler head. Turn the water on for about 30 to 60 seconds to flush any dirt and grit out of the line. Install the sprinkler head and charge the line, checking for leaks.

Check the rest of the heads. Turn on each zone, one at a time, and examine the direction, pressure and spray pattern of each head. Grit isn't the only culprit in wreaking havoc with sprinkler heads; our winters tend to do the same.

Clean the screens by removing the spray nozzle and cleaning the screen. Adjust the direction of spray heads by pushing down on the head while the water is on and turning. The spray pressure is usually adjusted with a small screw in the center of the nozzle. Complicated heads, like impact and gear drives, normally come with instructions how to adjust them.

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