

HOME WORK

Enter our sunflower contest

Growing sunflowers this summer? Keep nurturing them, give them plenty of sunshine and water and you just may have a winner.

The Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers and English Gardens are sponsoring their second annual High Hopes Sunflower Contest. First-, second- and third-place finishers for the tallest plant and widest seed head categories will be awarded.

Winners will receive \$75,

\$50 or \$25 gift certificates from English Gardens. Check the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers for entry forms. The deadline for entries is Monday, Aug. 27. The top entries in length and seed head for the 2001 season will be verified by judges.

Prizes will be awarded Sunday, Sept. 16, at English Gardens, 6370 Orchard Lake Road, West Bloomfield. Winners must appear at the awards to claim their prize.

Should technicians be electricians, too?

APPLIANCE DOCTOR



JOE GAGNON

Industries now requires appliance service technicians to be certified as residential maintenance specialty electricians.

Safety is an issue

"Consumer safety is the real issue here," said Doug Erickson, a technical specialist with the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, in the Appliance Service News.

"When we look inside a refrigerator or other household appliance, we see plenty of electrical wiring. This makes the appliance an extension of a home's electrical system, and thus subject to state regulations that assure that when such wiring is serviced, the host product remains safe to use," Erickson told ASN.

■ In Michigan, appliance repair technicians are not required by the state to take any test.

Erickson added that "95 percent of appliance repair work is electrical," involving the replacement of switches, wiring and heating elements, which justifies the need for certifying technicians as residential electricians.

Under the new mandate, all technicians must apply for the certification exam before Dec. 31. Each service firm in Washington State also must apply to be licensed as an electrical contractor, and one supervisor in each firm must be licensed as a residential maintenance administrator. Published reports indicate General Electric, Whirlpool and Sears Home Central lodged complaints about the certification program on behalf of their in-state service operations.

No testing in Michigan

In Michigan, appliance repair technicians are not required by the state to take any test. There is nothing a person has to do to be certified in this state and by the time anything is developed, we will own the British Isles and

Ontario will be part of the Upper Peninsula. No wonder that certain big names in the service industry are fighting this proposal and mandate in Washington State.

I doubt that half of the technicians will ever be able to pass the test. I know of service technicians in this state who would have a nervous breakdown if they tried to work on a microwave oven.

Help techs out

Now let's look at the other side of the coin and I think that it's about time we did something to increase the knowledge of an appliance service technician. If that person qualified as an electrician, wouldn't that be an advantage to anyone receiving appliance service? When a problem develops and it is thought to have something to do with an electrical breaker or fuses, what do you think the technician says to the consumer? "Call an electrician."

Here in our fair state, the appliance repair industry answers to no one. All other industries are governed by some sort of body in Lansing that assures licensing and regulation of some sort. There is currently not one governing body at our state Capital to ensure that appliance repair technicians are

competent or in the least, honest. The damage done to the industry's image - and to unsuspecting homeowners who've been ripped off - is a crying shame.

Even though I would like to see some method of control directed at the industry, I think that mandating that I become an electrician is a bit much. Knowing how to wire a burner on a stove or change a timer on a washer is a lot different than replacing the circuit breaker box in a house.

My viewpoint is mixed only because I have seen some of the biggest dummies making a living who do not know what they should. Homeowners should not attempt some of these repairs because they aren't safe. The very competent business owners in my industry would welcome some sort of qualification requirements applied to the appliance repair industry.

Can the state of Michigan realize such a need for this kind of dialogue among our legislators? Good question, isn't it? Stay tuned.

Joe Gagnon can be heard Saturday and Sunday on 760 WJR. He is a member and past president of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals. His phone number is (313) 873-9789.

Lead remnants may remain in old homes

ASK DAD



HARRY JACHYM

I've spent this summer unexpectedly as the general contractor for Habitat for Humanity of Western Wayne County. The group is building three houses in Inkster. Even though it has taken up much of my summer, the work helps keep me professionally current and I get a chance to meet and work with some very neat people.

While we were excavating for water taps, we found an old stop box, probably from a previous home on the lot. (A stop box is the underground valve that used to control the flow of water between the water main and the house.)

Remnants of lead pipe that actually once transported water into the house were attached to this stop box. Volunteers dis-

cussed that find throughout the day, and it got me to thinking about a column on the subject.

Lead once used

It's well known that lead in a person's system, especially children, can cause serious health problems. It's now believed that sources such as dust, soil, drinking water and some ceramic glazes are more likely potential lead sources than paint chips.

Homeowners can test for lead-based paint and glazes with a home test kit, usually available where paint is sold. As with most home test kits, positive results are usually more accurate than negative results. Even if you get a negative result, you should consider using a professional laboratory. Testing water is difficult and should be done by a lab.

The find at the Habitat site indicates there are likely still homes in our area with lead water supply pipes. Even in houses with copper plumbing, lead-based solder was used until a mid-1980s ban.

Lead in water is likely from solder joints or supply lines. If

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you feel there may be lead in your water from these sources, get it tested. In the meantime, cook and drink only with cold water and let the tap run for 30 seconds or more before using it.

Lead paint problems are usually best handled with interim management measures listed below by the do-it-yourselfer, then handled by a professional when a renovation is done. It's important to remember that this "in-place" management is not a one-time, permanent solution.

Resolve the problem

If you have lead-based paint, peeling paint needs to be removed and the chips disposed of properly, but sanding will cause lead-contaminated dust. If necessary, wet sand on sandpaper designed to be use with

water. Wash these areas with automatic dishwasher detergent (more environmentally friendly than high phosphate detergents). Also wash where doors rub against a jamb and windows slide (these points can create lead-containing dust). Change the wash water often and rinse thoroughly.

Cover with two coats of high-quality paint that will withstand frequent washings with dishwasher detergent.

Monitor these areas often looking for recurrence of paint dust. A federal law requires anyone doing remodeling or renovations for profit on homes built before 1978 must distribute a pamphlet from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA 747-K-99-001) to his customer before work begins. This pamphlet has a wealth of information about lead. It is available where paint is sold or online (PDF format) at www.epa.gov/lead

Harry Jachym, a licensed builder, lives in Plymouth and teaches building trades to high school students.

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