

Check appliances before calling service techs

We all realize how expensive it is to have a service technician knock on your door, but the reality is that the service tech's visit may be absolutely necessary.

Many intelligent consumers will not even make an attempt to solve their own appliance problems.

That's one of the big reasons why there is an appliance repair industry in this country. Whatever category of do-it-yourselfer that you fall in, I would like to tell you that some of it is easy and just plain common sense.

Let's take the woman who calls for service on her brand new dishwasher. She points out to the technician that it is taking four hours to complete the cycle. As the technician is going through his check list, he notices that the water line for the dishwasher is hooked up to the cold water pipe. He asks the homeowner why the unit is hooked up in that fashion, and she tells him the appliance

salesman at the store told her the dishwasher has a heater inside which heats the water.

The technician explains that the dishwasher does have a heater, but it must still be hooked up to the hot water pipe. This consumer ends up paying \$69 for a service call on a brand new product.

Remember, the warranty takes care of something wrong with the appliance, not the lack of common sense.

Let's take a Whirlpool dryer which stops heating or the drum stops turning. Ten years ago the manufacturer starting installing a little white plastic fuse on the blower side of the dryer. (If you remove the back panel, you will see it on the left side as you face it.)

This fuse is designed as a safety feature in case the air flows too slowly to the outside. I can assure you that several million dryer vent lines are installed incorrectly or just plain plugged up. Can you imagine how many service calls are rendered because the little fuse is blown? It costs nothing to have a service shop check it out and all you have to do is remove two screws and take the fuse to them.

The cost factor is around \$20.

One of the most common complaints are with the ice-maker in the refrigerator. The homeowner wasn't getting any ice cubes, so he removed three screws and a wire-harness plug and installed a brand new ice-maker.

He paid over \$100 for it and it still doesn't make ice. Furthermore he cannot return it for a refund because once he installed it, the ice-maker is now a used one. The poor guy is beside himself.

Think about it for a minute. If the ice-maker is not making ice, take a plastic beaker measuring cup and pour in water into the ice-maker mold. In two hours, if the ice cubes are dumped into the ice bucket, you have to figure the ice-maker is doing its job.

At this point all indications point to the water valve on the bottom back part of the refrigerator.

It doesn't take but a screwdriver and a small wrench to remove the valve and take it to a service shop to have it checked out. It's an easy job for any consumer to do.

I might suggest that if you are the type of person who

must call for a service technician, you should watch what they do when repairing your appliances. Any caring technician will be glad to explain what is wrong and what they are doing. From your observations you could gain a new sense of confidence.

There are still many mom-and-pop shops which will gladly explain the workings of a product and how to do-it-yourself.

Some of these shops have working samples of the very products in your home and can give you testing methods as well.

On should not lose that confidence you can gain from repairing something yourself.

You can tie the shoelace but you can't build the shoe. Know your limitations and do the job accordingly. Lay the parts out that you remove in a fashion where you can't become confused when you put it back together.

All common sense, isn't it?

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POOL

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installation. "I would be guessing on how long it took to pay for itself, probably two or three years."

Willoway can't take advantage of another solar benefit, an extended season, because it's only open when children are out of school.

Southeast Michigan summers feature more sun than Florida, and auxiliary heaters with a solar system often won't turn on, Donna Napolitano said. Currently there are about 2,000 solar pool systems in the area.

Another product that reduces attic heat buildup is a roof ventilator called the Solar Star. A solar-powered attic fan that also reduces condensation in winter.

"It's \$395 and takes 10 minutes to install," Napolitano said. "It comes with a 10-year warranty and a five-year warranty on the DC motor."

A solar panel continuously

collects sunlight and converts it into electrical power. There's nothing to plug in, nothing to wire, no electricians to call or permits to pull.

The Solar Star provides up to 1,200 square feet circulation coverage and the motor exchanges air up to 800 cubic feet per minute. It can also be used in garages or sheds.

The Napolitanos worked for other solar installers before starting Mechanical Energy Systems in 1986.

They continued through a difficult period of low fuel prices and discontinued tax credits partly by buying the mailing lists of the failed companies.

The company's office building at 8130 Canton Center Road will be outfitted with a SolarWall, an aluminum exterior wall that collects a thin layer of heated air.

A blower sends the air into the existing air ducts and often eliminates the need for a regular furnace in spring and fall. SolarWall has a 30-year life expectancy and can be found in 20 countries.

SCHOOL

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"A maximum of 5,000 watts is produced by the combined current," said Dennis Carter, who oversees Seaholm's Engineering Technology Department. "There aren't many sunny, windy days."

Running for three years, the installations include a wind generator atop a 60-foot tower and a 10-foot post and 28 photovoltaic panels on the lab's roof. Direct energy converters charge 16 batteries housed in the lab.

The \$7,000 tower is anchored to an 8-by-3-foot

wide footing and the photovoltaic array is 400 square feet in area.

"It took eight months to get an OK from Detroit Edison for use of the surplus energy," said Donna Napolitano of Mechanical Energy Systems.

Also conserving energy is a geothermal heat pump, put in by another contractor, that pumps a type of antifreeze through the ground. Via ground temperature averaging 55 degrees, the heat pump helps cool the lab in the summer and heat it in winter.

Mudjacking helps align those concrete slabs

Often the freeze-and-thaw cycles of a typical winter can cause concrete slabs, such as driveways, walks and steps, to sink or become uneven.

Concrete raising, often called mudjacking, or slabjacking, is an alternative to replacing these sunken slabs.

Mudjacking can lift driveways, porches and even streets, usually at a much lower cost than replacement. The process involves drilling holes (usually about an inch

and a half in diameter) through the affected concrete slab. A paste mixture of sandy loam, cement and water is pressure pumped under the slab through these holes. This pressure (usually about 100 psi or more) lifts and stabilizes the slab to its original height. The holes are patched, and then the slab is ready for use.

Mudjacking has several advantages. It is not as messy as removing and replacing a concrete slab. The slab can be used immediately after it has been lifted where concrete needs to set and cure. The process can be completed in most weather conditions.

There is much less noise and dust than associated with breaking old concrete slabs. Mudjacking is more environ-

mentally-friendly since there is no waste in the form of old concrete.

There is far less mess and disturbance of grass and landscaping than with concrete replacement.

Since the original slab is used, there is no mismatched color between slabs.

Of course, mudjacking has its disadvantages, too.

It is not a solution for foundation repairs.

The slab, or portion of slab being lifted must be in relatively good condition.

If the soil under the slab is unstable, there is a good chance that the slab will sink again.

Although concrete raising is usually less expensive than replacement, most companies

charge a minimal fee, which for small jobs, such as sidewalk flags, may make this choice unfeasible.

There are several concrete raising contractors in our area. Look in your local Yellow Pages under mudjacking, for one near you. As with all home improvement projects, get more than one estimate and check the contractor's references.

Harry Jachym writes Ask Dad, a column on home issues ranging from repairs and maintenance to building and remodeling projects. He is a Plymouth resident.

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