

APPLIANCE DOCTOR



JOE GAGNON

Manufacturers should be held accountable

A few months ago I announced to the whole world that I was finally going on the Internet and I'm sure that some of you thought me rather slow. I must agree with some and admit that I'm into it. I'm like a broom on a curling rink. I sweep away all negatives, move with precision and try to think of good things that manufacturers could do for consumers.

I discovered the Web site for the Product Safety Commission, www.cpsc.gov, and can't believe the amount of information that's available on all sorts of products. I switch over to major appliances and quickly notice that something very important is missing. That something is product problems discovered during the warranty period. Although these problems are not deemed dangerous, they are known by the manufacturer, and still covered by the first year full warranty. Consumers might not be aware of these problems.

Why is it that we, the people using the appliance, don't know anything about a defect?

I spend a lot of time on radio answering tons of questions pertaining to all sorts of different problems, and many times I will read something written by a manufacturer and sent to the service industry. This service pointer, advisory, or whatever they call them, tell the service industry to fix these problems, and how to do the job. Naturally because the product is still under warranty, the advisory also includes the words "do not charge the consumer."

But, what about the person who discovers a problem two to five years after the first year of complete warranty coverage? Believe me, these people pay full tilt for repairs. I know that manufacturers are guilty of causing this legal rip-off.

An example is a producer who ships out millions of washing machines only to discover that the transmission is defective and will need to be replaced. They inform the service industry (not us) about the problem and tell them to charge \$50 to the customer if it is in the second year of ownership.

If it's in the third year, charge the customer \$75, or the fourth year charge them \$100. If it is over five years old then let the consumer pay the going rate of maybe around \$250. Is there something wrong here folks, or is it just me? How the blues can a company do this and get away with it?

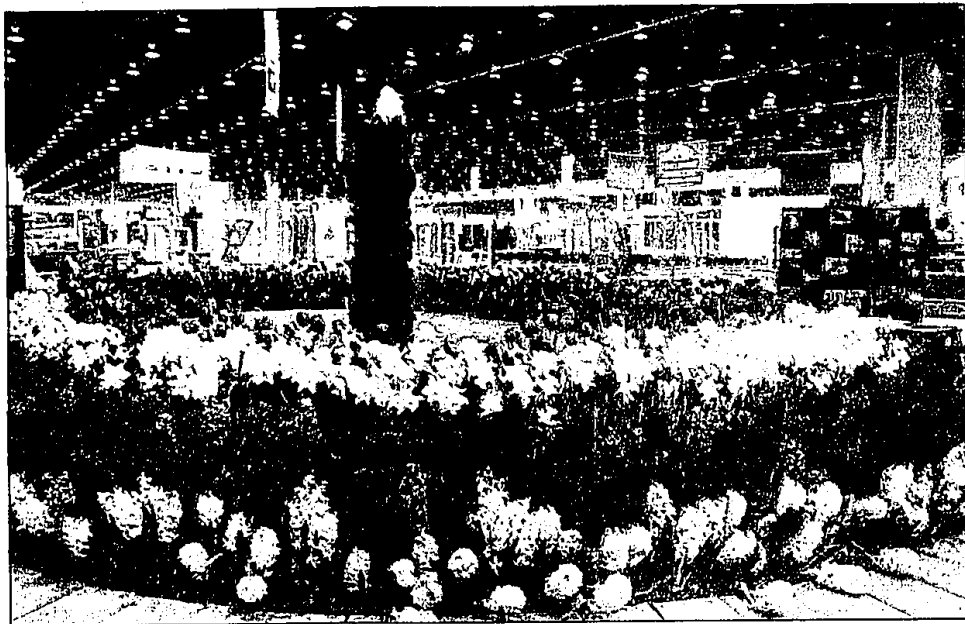
Now you have to remember one very important thing here, the fault in the product was in no way dangerous and as a result, the Product Safety Commission is not involved. The result is that manufacturers don't have to tell you one thing about a product problem.

I sometimes think that appliance companies would not breathe a word about a dangerous problem if they didn't have the fear of the severe fines imposed on them by Washington's Product Safety Commission should they not announce a serious fault.

As it is now, millions of dollars are spent needlessly on service calls when some folks had the work done for nothing. I guess you could call this story a secret warranty. That by the way is against the law. Maybe the good that can come out of this computer I'm using would be quick informative communication from the manufacturer directly to the consumer. This could happen over night, only if they really cared but don't you bank on 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.

Got a question for the Appliance Doctor? Call him at (313) 879-9789, or write to him in care of Kelly Kaleski Wygnik, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.



Stunning: This year's Home & Garden Show at Cobo Hall is expected to be bigger than last years with even more tulips, daffodils and other spring flowers.

Bursts of bulbs

Flowers highlighted at spring's largest home and garden show

BY LANA MINN
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Cobo Hall is being transformed next week. The neutral walls and corporate flooring will hide behind and under more than 20,000 colorful tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and other spring flowers. Colored brick pavers and ceramic tiles will create curvy paths to natural wooden decks sitting near reflecting ponds and waterfalls.

It's the flowers that attract the crowds at the GMC Builders Home & Garden Show said Mark J. Baldwin, of Plymouth.

Baldwin is coordinator of the show's garden display and his job is to make each year's displays bigger and bolder.

"The garden display brings a hint of spring to us early," he said. Show-goers will see home and garden ideas from locally based businesses.

The 84th annual show from March 21-24 also features chefs, wedding planners and dancers. The home show has morphed from an



Splash: Many of the flowering bulbs will be for sale, others will be donated to improve urban areas of Detroit.

event focused on home improvement ideas to a full-day family event destination. The Cafeteria Entertainment Stage will host cloggers, Polynesian

dancers, Polish dancers, Country music and more. There'll even be a wedding ceremony on Friday.

"We have celebrities, educational seminars, show-

stopping specials and many exciting ideas," said Dan MacLeish, of MacLeish Building, Inc., in Troy, and a

Please see SHOW, C2

IF YOU WANT TO ATTEND

■ The 84th Annual GMC Home & Garden Show, presented by the Building Industry Association of Southeastern Michigan, runs Thursday to Sunday, March 21-24 at the Cobo Center in Detroit.

■ Hours: 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

■ Admission: \$7 for adults; seniors \$6; kids 12 and under admitted free.

MORE GARDENS

■ The Spring Home and Garden Show at the Novi Expo Center, at I-96 at Novi Road, is scheduled from April 4-7. Thursday and Friday from 2-10 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m.-10 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

■ Admission is \$6 for adults and \$5 for seniors. Kids 12 and under admitted free.

For more information on either show visit www.builders.org or call (248)862-1019

Get ready for gardening season now

Soon the weather will be warm enough to start cleaning up our gardens, but not just yet. Meanwhile, here are some things you can do now toward the gardening season:

Make a list of seeds you will need and buy them; some stores are offering packets at discount now. Try something new this year, either a flower or vegetable. Directions on the packages are very helpful.

If you were too busy last fall and didn't clean your tools, now's the time to get them in tiptop shape.

Sharpen dull blades. Any tools with rust on them will need cleaning. Paint a bright color on wooden handles so they'll be easier to see if they get left in the garden.

To polish wooden handles, rub them

GARDEN SPOT



MARTY FIELEY

Be sure the ground has thawed (damage to the grass will result if it is walked on while frozen) and drive any

with boiled linseed oil to protect the wood and give them a bright look. The fragrance will remind you of sunshine!

Have the lawnmower blade sharpened if it needs it. If you are a container gardener, scrub the pots thoroughly with a 1-to-10 solution of bleach and water, and then rinse well.

wobbly posts or poles back into the ground.

Carry a ball of twine with you to retrieve vines such as clematis, roses or honeysuckle in case strong winds begin to blow.

Stones, bricks and other hard surfaces may have become loose. Straighten them now before you forget and someone takes a fall.

Rake through patches of straw-colored, matted grass as snow melts to speed drying and hinder snow mold.

Check carefully to see if perennials have heaved from the ground and gently replace them in the beds.

Pruning

If you have deciduous plants or broadleaf and narrow leaf evergreens

that need to be moved, do it before bud breaks. This can be done whenever soil and air temperatures are above freezing.

Prune and destroy infected branches on dormant deciduous trees and shrubs. Look for black knot swellings on members of the cherry family; cut several inches below distorted growth back into healthy wood. Check for fire blight on mountain ash trees.

Prune shrubs that bloom in midsummer on spring growth. Don't prune those that bloom in the spring until after they flower. Most evergreens prefer to be pruned in mid-June. Cut back ornamental grasses to 4 inches.

A little later this month, cut back those plants that didn't get groomed last

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