Ken Abramczyk, editor
(248) 901-2591
Fax: (248) 644-1314
kabramczyk@oe.homecomm.net

At Home

INTERIOR DESIGN ■ DIY ■ GARDENING

Good lookin'
Check out the winners of our Make Over My Man contest.
Observer Life, C5

Accents

Gas leaks

With summer rapidly approaching, now may be a good time to review natural gas safety with your children. Knowing what a natural gas emergency is and how to react will help keep your family safe. Leaks can occur on indoor lines or when outdoor lines are damaged.

Even at home, youngsters need to know the three R's: recognize, react and report.

Recognizing a natural gas leak means to know its signs - a "rotten egg" odor, a blowing or hissing sound, dead or discolored vegetation in an otherwise green area, flames if a leak has ignited, dirt or dust blowing from a hole in the ground or bubbling in wet or flooded areas.

If you suspect a gas leak, you should react by leaving the area immediately, and report it by calling MichCon or Consumers Energy at (800) 477-5050 and following their instructions.

Don't use electrical devices, such as light switches, telephones or appliances, such as garage door openers. They could spark and ignite the gas. Don't use an open flame, matches or lighters, nor should you try to find the source of the gas leak. Don't try to shut off gas valves or appliances. Don't start vehicles. Don't re-enter your home or area until you are told by a gas company official that it is safe to do so.

Leather tips

With the popularity of leather furnishings increasing, consumers need to know how to seek quality pieces and what to ask before they buy. "A well-cared for piece of leather furniture will last four times longer that an upholstered piece," said Mark Morganroth, head designer and CEO of Sherwood Studios of West Bloomfield. "The following tips will help to ensure the furniture you buy is going to give you many, many years of enjoyment."

There are several types of leather available. Sherwood Studios recommends only top grain aniline dyed leather, which is the best quality and therefore, the most expensive.

Top grain or full grain leather is taken from the outer surface of the hide, tanned and colored with transparent aniline dyes. The dye is transparent, enhancing the special patterns and colors of the hide. No corrections or alterations are made to the natural grain pattern; each hide is one of a kind.

Sherwood doesn't recommend corrected grain or split-grain leathers. Some lines of furniture labeled "genuine leather" use split leathers which are half the thickness and therefore, half the strength of top grain leather. Leather breathes so it isn't hot in the summer and cold in the winter; it remains at the room's temperature. (It may feel cold at first, but it warms to body temperature quickly.) Leather ages well and develops a patina or sheen over time. It is easy to care for and clean, doesn't crack and peel, keeps its shape and resists heat and sun damage. The most important tip, according to Morganroth, is to buy a name-brand, well-constructed piece of furniture.

[illegible] power to you

[illegible] ty kits [illegible] rmy weather

[illegible] the weather, and some peo- [illegible] about it. They prepare for the [illegible] severe storms.

[illegible] includes finding the right generator to use as a backup system in case a storm knocks out electrical power in a home, putting together a safety kit to have on hand, and knowing what to do when warning of a tornado or severe storm is issued.

According to AAA Michigan, the typical tornado season runs April to August, with the peak in May and June.

"Every household needs a generator," said Rick Willis, general manager of Manus Power Mowers, 30642 Woodward in Royal Oak.

"If you've ever been without electricity, it's a hassle. There have been people who call us back and say they don't know how they got along without (a generator)."

Some people have backup generators, he said.

CONSIDERATIONS

Smaller size generators (50 to 60 pounds) are more for camping than for operating such things as a sump pump, furnace and refrigerator for a house. Larger generators weigh about 190 pounds; owners should have a generator this size in a wheel kit so it can be moved.

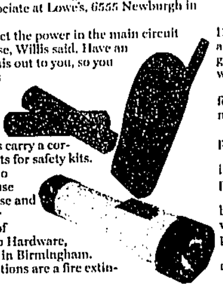
Items in a house have different wattage requirements in order to run. Guides listing these are available in stores.

The amount of watts needed to start appliances with electric motors also has to be considered; the rule of thumb to figure this is to multiply the wattage requirements by 3 (for example, a drill with a rated wattage requirement of 300 would need 900 watts to start). Generators have such features as idle control, and recoil or electric start. They use regular gasoline fuel. Maintenance includes checking the oil and air filter.

Generators should be stored in a shed or garage and run outside, never inside.

"You don't want fumes coming in," said Jason Crandall, sales associate at Lowe's, 6555 Newburgh in Westland.

Always disconnect the power in the main circuit breaker of the house, Willis said. Have an electrician point this out to you, so you know what it looks like.



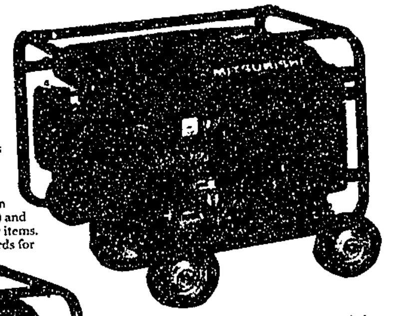
MAKING A KIT

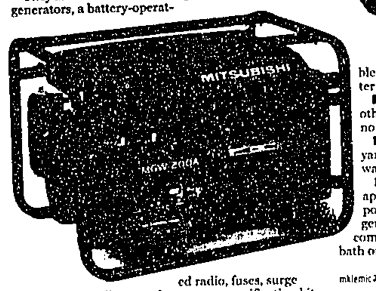
Hardware stores carry a cornucopia of elements for safety kits.

When it comes to assembling a kit, use "Just common sense and basics," said Roger Reynolds, owner of Neighborhood Pro Hardware, 33801 Woodward in Birmingham. Among his suggestions are a fire extinguisher, duct tape, gloves and such basic tools as a screwdriver.

Dennis and Karen Wright, owners of Wright's Do It Best Hardware, 29150 W. Five Mile in Livonia, suggest having a table lantern ("You can't get out of homework," Karen said) and flashlights – and batteries for these and other items.

They also recommend having extension cords for generators, a battery-operat-





ed radio, fuses, surge protectors, candles, matches, a water purification kit, ready-to-eat meals from an army surplus store, and nonperishable food such as peanut butter and dried fruit. Check expiration dates on prescriptions.

Sternos (canned heat) are good to have, Karen Wright said; put one under a fondue pot to heat soup or coffee. You can also cook on a barbecue if you keep propane. The Wrights speak from experience. Dennis advises to keep your chain saw sharpened – once after a storm he had to cut a heavy branch that would have blocked a door. Karen keeps a bag filled with essential items. "It's a nice, reassuring feeling to have it on hand," she said.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

Regardless of whether it is tornado season, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security offers a brochure and Web site that give tips on preparing for emergency situations (call (800) BE-READY, or visit www.ready.gov).

These include how to store and prepare water and food for at least three days; and first aid and special needs items to have on hand.

AAA Michigan offers these steps to help families plan what to do if a severe weather warning sounds:

■ Designate a family shelter. In stick-built homes, it should be near the centermost portion of the home, preferably a basement.

Avoid doors and windows. The shelter should be under something sturdy, such as a staircase, workbench or temporary shelter space with overhead protection.

As a general rule, if you don't have a basement, put as many walls between you and the tornado as possible. If you are in a mobile home, designate a shelter in a permanent structure.

■ If you are in a trailer or mobile home, seek other shelter immediately, like a ditch. If there is no time, use the bathtub.

■ Make a habit of removing objects from your yard that can become flying debris if a tornado watch is announced.

■ Indoors in a thunderstorm, unplug major appliances to avoid damage from lightning power surges. Use the phone only in an emergency. Use surge protectors on appliances and computers to help minimize damage. Don't take a bath or shower during a thunderstorm.

mklemic@oe.homecomm.net | (248) 901-2569

Inspect, prepare home before storms strike

AAA Michigan urges residents to check over their homes to be sure they are ready before spring and summer storms occur.

Homeowners should heed the following storm safety tips:

■ Be sure soil around foundation is properly graded so excess water drains away to help prevent basement leaks.

■ Clean and test eaves troughs for effectiveness with a hose to make sure downspouts run free. Downspouts should direct rainwater at least 3 feet from the foundation.

■ Trim branches off nearby trees so leaves don't clog eaves. Repair loose eaves and make sure they are angled for proper drainage.

■ Test your sump pump. Keep basement drains clear and keep items off the basement floor.

■ Inspect basement walls for cracks and fill with sealant.

■ During storms and before going on vacation, unplug all major electrical appliances and use surge protectors on computers.

■ Fill above-ground pools to prevent collapse due to winds.

■ Replace glass storm doors with screens or plastic inserts.

■ Take in patio furniture and lower umbrellas if storms are imminent.

Going solar in heating the pool

BY DOUG MILLS
CORRESPONDENT

With the apparent arrival of warm weather, business is brisk at Mechanical Energy Systems Inc., a heating and cooling company in Canton.

Interest in renewable energy products, including particularly cost-efficient solar pool heating, helps keep up the work pace of owners Donna and Joe Napolitano.

"A solar pool heating system costing $3,000 will pay for itself in two or three years," said Donna Napolitano.

"By financing a system, you also have smaller up-front costs compared to a conventional system."

Other efficiencies include less maintenance, few moving parts, and less interior heat because heated water circulates from solar collectors on an attic roof. It then flows down PVC pipe to a pool, where water temperature is warmed by 3 to 5 degrees with each pass.

The owner of Willoway Day Camp in Wixom and its 175-person pool agrees that solar applications can be efficient.

"We had it put in about 20 years ago," Arnold Fisher said about the Mechanical Energy Systems

PLEASE SEE POOL, C3

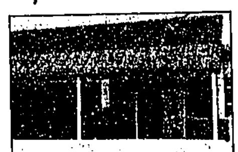
Solar application in place at school

BY DOUG MILLS
CORRESPONDENT

Electricity produced at Birmingham's Seaholm High School powers the energy lab with surplus metered into other parts of the building.

A combined wind generator and photovoltaic array, installed by Mechanical Energy Systems of Canton, provide power for the lab's computers, experiments and lights.

PLEASE SEE SCHOOL, C3

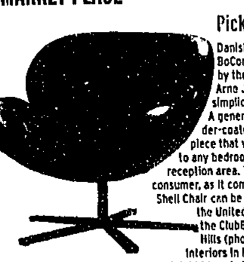


Electricity produced at Birmingham's Seaholm High School powers the energy lab with surplus metered into other parts of the building.

MARKET PLACE

Submissions

Do you have a special item you'd like to showcase in Marketplace on the front of At Home? We'd like to feature it! Send a photo or slide of the piece, along with information, to: Ken Abramczyk, At Home editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.



Pick up this Shell

Danish furniture manufacturer and retailer BoConcept presents the Shell Chair. Inspired by the designs of fellow Danish countryman Arne Jacobsen, the chair offers sculptural simplicity coupled with visually striking style. A generous 360-degree swivel seat, and powder-coated steel frame and base, make this a piece that will be a sturdy and attractive addition to any bedroom, living room, office, gallery or reception area. The chair can be customized for each consumer, as it comes in more than 80 fabric options. The Shell Chair can be ordered through BoConcept stores in the United States or these local retailers under the ClubB label: Colorworks Studio in Farmington Hills (phone (248) 851-7540), Inter-Continental Interiors in Rochester (phone (248) 651-9430), and Bright Ideas in Royal Oak (phone (248) 541-9940).

In the pink

Pink wallpapers have always been popular for bedrooms and baths. Now consumers are discovering that pink papers work well throughout the house. Brewster Wallcovering Company has a pink wallpaper for every room, in patterns ranging from faux finishes to florals and combined with colors to coordinate with any scheme.
For example, the new Kenneth James Hamilton Park Collection features a lush traditional floral on a creamy, yellow background. For more information, call (800) 366-1700, visit www.brewster-wallcovering.com, or write Brewster Wallcovering Company, 67 Pacella Park Drive, Randolph, MA 02368.