

10 Do It Yourself Home Maintenance and Repair Tips

The following article is about 10 very common maintenance or repair problems that are encountered by a residential home owner. I would venture to say that even if you're just a little bit handy, all ten items can be handled by the average homeowner and will save thousands of dollars.

1. Main water valve location and identification
2. Repair doors that stick
3. Tub and shower caulking
4. Washing machine hose leaks
5. Concrete front step crack problems
6. Hot water heater problems
7. Gutter and downspout water control
8. Cloths dryer vent duct cleaning
9. Water flood alarm for 10 dollars
10. Door bell replacement, made easy

MAIN WATER VALVE

Main water valve location and identification - One of the most important things to know about your house is where to shut off the water when there is a water problem. Every member of the household should know where the main valve is and how to shut it off in case of an emergency. Another important point is that the valve should turn easily so that even a very young person could turn the water off. It is also recommended that a tag be put on the main valve so that it is easily recognized as such. Many times people know where the valve is located but, when a water problem develops, they don't remember which valve is the main valve. The tag will identify the valve and could save thousands of dollars by keeping water damage to a minimum.

REPAIR DOORS THAT STICK

Repair doors that stick and/or rub - Doors that rub against the door frame often cause the door to stick. Many interior doors and door frames swell with humidity and start to rub and stick. This is different from a door that is completely out of square due to a structural problem. Most rubbing and sticking problems come from one of two causes:

One - The hinges are loose and need to be tightened to pull the door back into the proper position.

Two - The door and frame swell in the summer and close perfectly in the winter.

A simple door sticking situation is repaired as follows:

(1) Check the hinges to make sure they are tight and supporting the door properly. If the hinges are loose most likely the hinges are the reason why the door is rubbing and sticking. If this is the case, tighten the screws. If the screws won't tighten, try an old time carpenter's trick to tighten loose screws. First, support the door and take off the loose hinge screws. Next insert toothpicks into the screw hole or holes with a dab of glue. Allow 20 minutes for the glue to dry and then reinsert the screws. You'll be amazed at how tight the toothpicks have made the screws.

(2) If the hinges are tight but the door is rubbing, the door needs to be trimmed. An inexpensive tool can be bought to do the job. The tool is called a block planer hand rasp. The cost is probably under \$10 and can be purchased in Lowe's, or Home Depot, or a local hardware store. It looks like a small hand held flat cheese grater. This quick repair is done with the door in place. There is no need to remove the door. Mark the door with a pencil where the door is rubbing the frame. Now that the spot is marked, you can proceed to plane the area on the side of the door that is sticking until the door closes properly. This type of repair usually only takes a few minutes and very little material has to be removed from the area that sticks. If you have to remove a lot of material to make the door close, it would probably be better to have a professional carpenter evaluate the door problem.

TUB AND SHOWER CAULKING

Caulking around tub and shower - One job every home owner should learn to do is to caulk around the tub and shower. It's a job that has to be done every couple of years and it's a job that is a must to avoid water damage. Whether you are caulking a tub or shower the hardest part of the whole job is cleaning out the old caulk. For the purpose of this article, the following steps are a good guide as to how to caulk that tub or shower and have it look like a professional job.

(1) Remove the old caulk with a scrapper or razor blade and then clean the area with any good household cleaner. It is very important to have the caulking area squeaky clean. The caulk won't adhere to a dirty surface.

(2) Now wipe down the squeaky clean area with denatured alcohol before applying the new caulk. The alcohol does a good job of removing any soap or chemical residue allowing the caulk to really adhere to the surface and seal it.

(3) The type of caulk used is important. It should be "a water clean up caulk." Look for caulk that reads Water Clean-up for Bathrooms. There are 2 types and either will do the job: the squeeze tube caulk or the caulk that has to be used with a three dollar sealant application gun.

(4) The secret of having the job look like a professional installation is in the way excess caulk is removed. After the caulk is applied and it is still wet, use a small wet sponge to wipe down the caulk. Rinse the sponge frequently in a bucket of warm water. The sponge will push the caulk into any small cracks and spaces and the finish bead will look great.

(5) Let the caulk dry for 24 hours before using the tub or shower and then call all your friends to come over and see the great job you did. Be sure to take pictures!

WASHING MACHINE HOSES

Leaks from washing machine hoses - One of the leading causes of residential water damage is the failure of a washing machine rubber hose. Typically a standard rubber hose has a life expectancy of 3 to 5 years. However, there are some very good upgrade hoses that will minimize or eliminate any water damage caused by worn rubber hoses. The installation of the hose is easy and the job could be done in just a few minutes. The most common replacement hose which is much safer than the rubber hose is the stainless steel braided hose. This type of hose can be purchased at any large hardware store and is stronger and safer than a rubber hose against a sudden hose rupture. Another hose that is very reliable is the Floodchek hose which comes with a 20 year guarantee. The braided hoses are about \$30 and the Floodchek hose costs about \$50. The upgrade of washing machine hoses is well worth the effort to avoid water problems and have peace of mind. More information about the Floodchek washing machine hose can be found on the Internet.

CONCRETE FRONT STEP CRACK PROBLEMS

Crack problems in concrete front steps - Concrete and stone steps are notorious for cracking where the handrail is mounted into the step. It appears as if the hole where the hand rail is mounted into the steps is not filled with concrete to the top of the step. This allows water to get into the hole. When the cold weather arrives, the water freezes in the hole and the step cracks. Additional water then gets into that crack, the water freezes, and the entire corner of the step breaks off. As a maintenance precaution against getting a cracked step, we suggest filling any unfilled holes around a handrail mounting with Vinyl Concrete Patcher, made by Quikrete. You can also use this product to fill in cracks that may already be in the step and hopefully avoid further damage. This is an easy product to use, just add water, mix, and apply with a putty knife.

HOT WATER HEATER PROBLEMS

Aging hot water heaters - Most water heaters last 10 to 12 years. Wet spots on the floor or a rusted tank may signal a problem. Other signs that the hot water heater is at the end of life is when the water smells like rotten eggs or, when the heater is creating hot water, it sounds like there are marbles rolling around inside the tank. When any of these signs are noted, the tank is usually between 10 and 15 years old and ready for replacement. It is best to replace a heater before it leaks and avoid any water damage. We have two other suggestions about hot water tanks:

One - If you are not in a financial position to buy a new tank, buy a "watchdog water alarm" and place it at the base of the heater to warn you if a leak develops. When the alarm sounds as a warning signal, hopefully the water can be turned off in time to minimize any water damage. The alarm is very inexpensive at a cost of about \$10 in Lowe's or Home Depot.

Two - If you are installing a new heater install a catch pan under the heater, if possible, with a drain line to the exterior of the house. If a leak develops and you have a catch pan and drain, the water will be diverted and discharged to the exterior. Plastic drain pans cost about \$10.

GUTTER AND DOWNSPOUT WATER CONTROL

Gutter down spout extensions - The number one culprit for causing water penetration into the basement of a house is rain gutter downspouts discharging rain water right alongside the foundation. All downspouts should discharge the water at least five feet or more from the foundation. If a downspout is discharging water right alongside the foundation, we recommend installing downspout extensions. That is an easy job that most people can do themselves. Getting the water away from the foundation will help to avoid water penetration into the basement. Close-to-the-house downspout discharge is not the problem of all water problems in the basement, but it is certainly one of the major ones. If a water penetration problem develops in the basement, before you call in a waterproofing contractor, check the downspout discharge area. As already mentioned the correction may be as simple as installing extensions on the downspouts and discharging the water away from the house. One other tip on water penetration and downspout discharge, if your downspout discharges to an under ground discharge pipe and you are getting water penetration in the downspout area, you may have a damaged underground discharge pipe. That pipe may be discharging water right alongside the foundation causing the water intrusion. To determine whether or not the in-ground pipe is damaged and causing the problem, disconnect the downspout from the in-ground pipe and put a five foot extension on the downspout. This will allow the water discharge to occur above the ground. If the water penetration into the basement stops, it will be

evident that the broken in-ground pipe line is the problem. If that's the case, you can either dig up and repair the pipe or just stay with the above ground discharge extension.

CLOTHES DRYER VENT MAINTENANCE

Maintaining clothes dryer vents - Most clothes dryer vent ducts are of short length and can be cleaned by the home owner. However, there are some long runs of twenty feet or more that may run in crawl spaces or in non-floored attics. It is recommended that these type ducts be cleaned by a professional with special duct cleaning equipment.

Tell-tale signs that the vent needs cleaning:

Clothes are still damp at the end of a normal cycle.

Clothes are hotter than usual at the end of the cycle.

Clothes have a musty smell after drying.

There is a great deal of lint escaping from the back of the dryer.

The flapper on the vent exhaust hood doesn't open when the dryer is running or there is a lot of lint covering the vent exhaust hood.

Dryer operation and maintenance tips:

Clean the lint filter before and after every drying cycle.

Replace a vinyl duct with a ridge or flexible metal duct. The metal duct creates less lint buildup at the bends and is a safer duct.

For safety reasons, never leave the dryer running when you leave the house or go to bed.

Cleaning the vent duct if you have a short length duct – A short length duct is one which goes from the back of the dryer directly through the wall of the house to the exterior. The hardest part of the cleaning job is pulling the dryer out from the wall to disconnect the duct.

Note - Always turn off the gas valve before working on the dryer. Be careful not to damage the flexible gas line when pulling the dryer out from the wall. Sometimes it may be necessary to turn off the gas by using the small valve at the dryer gas line. Then you can disconnect the gas line and pull the dryer away from the wall safely to disconnect the vent duct. Once the duct is disconnected, we recommend taking the duct outside so lint is not spread all over. To clean the duct, use a shop vacuum or a regular house vacuum and vacuum the duct out from each end. If you don't have a vacuum, tie a toilet brush to a rope and pull it through the vent. This method is called "the handy-man special," and does a pretty good job. Next check the back section of the dryer for lint buildup and check the vent discharge cap and flapper for lint buildup and blockage. The vent doesn't have to be squeaky clean, just clean enough for good air flow. After the dryer is back in place and functional, you can announce "We just saved a hundred dollars by cleaning the dryer vent ourselves."

TEN DOLLAR WATER ALARM

Watchdog water alarm - If you have a water problem in certain areas, a ten dollar water alarm in the area can avoid a serious water damage problem by giving an early warning. Areas such as washing machines, hot water heaters, sump pumps or any other areas that are prone to develop water problems are perfect for these little gadgets. These little alarms are great and can be purchased at Lowe's or Home Depot.

REPLACE DOORBELL

Replacing the doorbell - There are two easy fixes if you have a doorbell that is missing or destroyed, or you're just plain tired of fixing the doorbell. The first door bell solution is to install a door knocker and be done with the doorbell. The second solution is to install a wireless doorbell that is run by battery. Both solutions are "Do-it-yourself solutions."

HOME INSPECTION PERFECTIONS
Pest Control