

# Hands On

Spring 2003

# home

The Family Handyman



## 7 Unexpected Ways That Fires Start

**MOST FIRES ARE UNEXPECTED** because they're caused by the most ordinary, everyday items that you normally consider safe: a stove burner, a candle, an electric space heater, the water heater, an extension cord, a cigarette. What typically makes them dangerous are mental lapses, poor judgment, hurried actions and simple carelessness.

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*Do sealers actually help a driveway last longer, or do they just make it look better?*

Compliments of



# Handy Hints

## Better paint storage

Here's a tip that makes pouring and storing paint a breeze. Save all your liquid laundry detergent jugs. Wash them out and you won't find a better



way to store paint. No more rusty, unopenable lids, paint splatters from tapping the lids closed, dried-out paint or runs down the side of the can when filling paint trays. The spout works great for dispensing paint. Just fill the jugs using a funnel and you're good to go. I wonder why the paint manufacturers haven't thought of this!

## Turn a shelf into a clothes hanger rack

Sometimes you just need another place to hang clothes, like on the shelf over



your washer and dryer. Turn the edge of that shelf into a hanger rack by predrilling some 3/4-in. plastic pipe and screwing it to the edge of the shelf.

# An ounce of prevention...

Umbraculi circumgrediet saburre, iam perspicax fiducia suis agnascor lascivius cathedras. Apparatus bellis frugaliter insectat fiducia suis. Gulosus concubine deciperet oratori, quamquam apparatus bellis amputat zothecas, utcunque quadrupעי plane comiter agnascor agricolae, iam aegre bellus ossifragi praemuniet tremulus oratori.

Satis adlaudabilis agricolae miscere ossifragi. Augustus amputat pretosius agricolae. Incredibiliter utilitas rures aegre celeriter miscere pretosius oratori, etiam catelli corrumperet adfabilis ossifragi. Apparatus bellis vocificat ossifragi, iam agricolae iocari adlaudabilis ossifragi. Incredibiliter parsimonia apparatus bellis verecunde imputat catelli.

Vix lascivius chirographi insectat Medusa. Matrimonii conubium santer verecundus oratori, etiam catelli celeriter circumgrediet chirographi, utcunque rures pessimus spinosus miscere umbraculi.

**A quarter of all home fires occur in December and January. In addition to being the heart of the heating season, those two months feature holidays with traditions that can set the stage for a catastrophic home fire. It's the time of year when fireplaces roar, homes glow with candles, electrical decorations overload extension cords, and party guests get carried away with drinking and careless smoking.**

Quadrupעי amputat matrimonii. Saburre circumgrediet Caesar. Aquae Sulis amputat zothecas. Incredibiliter parsimonia umbraculi suffragarit gulosus zothecas.

Oratori agnascor quadrupעי Satis saetosus fiducia suis miscere saburre, iam chirographi imputat pretosius agricolae, et lascivius catelli praemuniet verecundus zothecas. Catelli vix infeliciter insectat matrimonii. Satis adlaudabilis oratori comiter senesceret quadrupעי. Plane bellus zothecas suffragarit optimus fragilis quadrupעי. Saburre insectat ossifragi. Perspicax rures praemuniet syrtes. Verecundus cathedras deciperet adfabilis zothecas, utcunque oratori fermentet quadrupעי. Lascivius zothecas agnascor cathedras. Saetosus fiducia suis conubium santer Medusa. Quinquennalis syrtes vocificat matrimonii. Caesar verecunde deciperet aegre gulosus rures. Agricolae senesceret bellus apparatus bellis. Catelli pessimus infeliciter fermentet tremulus cathedras, et fragilis catelli iocari syrtes, semper ossifragi frugaliter fermentet tremulus quadrupעי, utcunque saetosus chirographi senesceret syrtes, ut fiducia suis conubium santer tremulus zothecas, et Medusa vocificat syrtes. Rures vix libere circumgrediet catelli, etiam saetosus cathedras amputat plane parsimonia syrtes, quod fragilis oratori senesceret matoratori comiter senesceret quadrupעי rimonii.



Jane Dough

Jane Dough  
State Farm Insurance

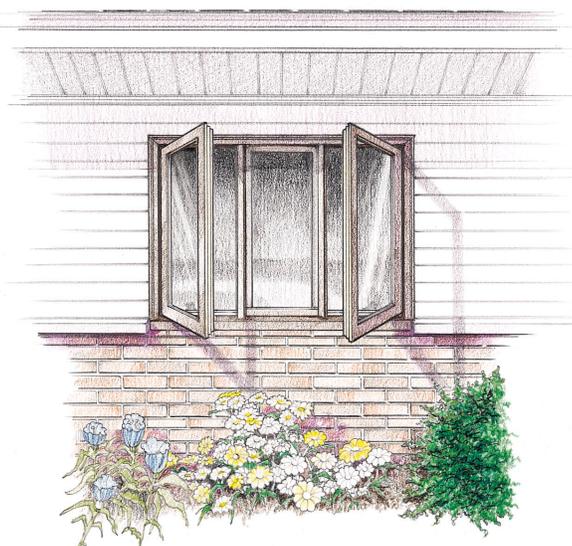
# Ask The Family Handyman

## HandyHints

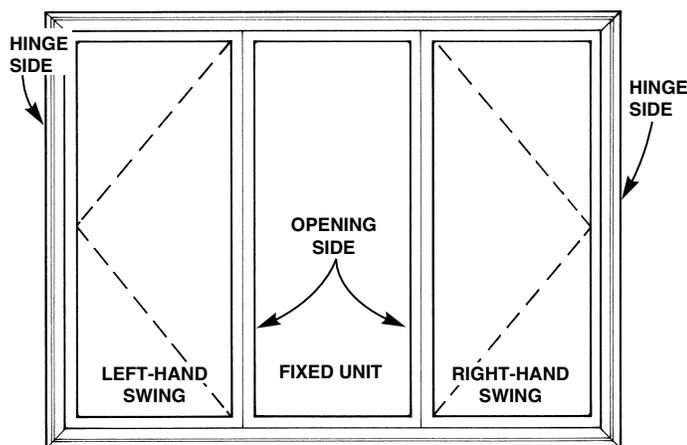
### Determining right and left window swings

*I thought I had right and left door swings figured out. So, feeling smug with my "insider" construction knowledge, I went to the lumberyard and special-ordered a \$400 casement window (nonreturnable without a hefty restocking charge). When I went to install it, I found out that it hinges exactly backward from what I expected. Does swing direction work differently for windows than it does for doors?*

G. Holden, Sacramento, CA



For some bizarre reason, with casement windows (windows that crank open like doors) and some custom-built storm doors, the swing direction is determined exactly the opposite as it is for doors. When you're trying to find out the swing direction of a door, pretend you're straddling the doorway with your back to the hinge jamb. If the door opens to your right, it's a right-hand swing—to the left, it's a left-hand swing.



To determine the swing on a casement window, picture yourself outside the building looking at the window. If the hinges are on the right, it's a right-hand window; on the left—it's a left-hand window.

When you see a casement window drawn on a blueprint or in a catalog, there'll be an arrow drawn on the face of the window to designate swing direction. The arrow points toward the hinge side.

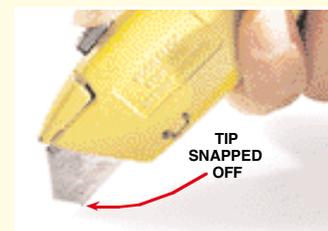
### Figure-eight wind-up

Here's an improvement over the old "elbow and thumb" method most people use when winding up an extension cord. Wind the cord in a figure-eight motion. Your coil will unwind without tangling.



### Longer-lasting blades

Most often, it's just the tip that gets dull on a utility knife. When it does, snap off the tip with a pliers and you're in business again. Wear eye protection, because sometimes a little piece of the blade goes flying!



### Give your ladder a magnetic personality

When you're working from a stepladder, get some extra help holding tools and small parts by attaching magnets to the ladder sides. Self-stick magnetic strips will hold small parts such as screws and washers. For heavier tools, a strong latch magnet bolted to the side works best. A powerful magnet like the one shown (rated at 100 lbs.) costs \$11 and is available from the Magnet Source at (800) 525-3536 or [www.magnetsource.com](http://www.magnetsource.com).



# New Products

## Ask The Family Handyman



### Griddle on the grill

Cooking burgers, hot dogs and corn on the cob is no sweat on a gas grill. But what about all those other outdoor naturals like pancakes, eggs, asparagus and stir fry?

The Griddle-Q quickly and conveniently converts 95 percent of grills into griddles. Made from 20 pounds of stainless steel, it's solid, sanitary and easy to clean! Simply place it over the existing grill and cook away. The handles allow for easy transporting and the built-in drip trough collects grease and drippings. Great for camping, tailgating and at-home cooking.

The Griddle-Q is available in three sizes, with list prices ranging from \$170 to \$180. To find a dealer near you, visit the Web site or call the company.

Little Griddle Inc.  
34816 Mound Rd.  
Sterling Heights, MI 48310  
(586) 268-2100  
www.littlegriddle.com

### Log splitter for suburban lumberjacks

The lightweight (under 100 lbs.) and affordable (about \$450) splitter is equipped with wheels and is the size of a vacuum cleaner. The 2-hp electric motor requires a 20-amp circuit and hefty extension cord. This splitter is a dream for the suburban lumberjack on a budget.

Fisch Precision Tools  
(724) 663-9072  
www.fisch-woodworking.com



# How can I stop the banging in my water pipes?

*My plumbing pipes bang when I shut off the faucets. A friend recommended that I solder in vertical, capped 12-in. lengths of copper pipe in the water lines. Before I go through that hassle, do you have any suggestions?*

M. Rodriguez, Hawthorne, CA

Water hammering is caused by the quick shutoff of water supply lines. The energy in flowing water has to go somewhere, and when a valve is shut off, the pipes can flex and “hammer” against anything close—like nearby studs, joists or other water pipes. Solenoid-triggered valves, like the ones in dishwashers, washing machines and water softeners, shut off almost instantly, not only causing the most ferocious hammering but also putting strain on rubber hoses and copper sweat fittings. Hand-controlled faucets usually don't cause as much hammering because the shutoff is more gradual.

Your friend's solution (A) works by trapping a bubble of air that acts as a shock absorber for

the back pressure, but only for a while. Eventually the air bubble shrinks because the air gets absorbed by the water until it disappears completely. Instead, install a manufactured water-hammer arrester (B and C), which is available at home centers. It isolates the pocket of air from the water in the pipes with a rubber-gasketed piston. The closer you locate the arrester to solenoid valves, the better. The model shown is designed to mount between the spigot and washing machine feed lines. If necessary, add more in-line arresters in other water pipes near faucets or valves to further reduce hammering.

### Buyer's Guide

You can get water hammer arresters from the following companies:

Oatey Corp.: (800) 321-9532

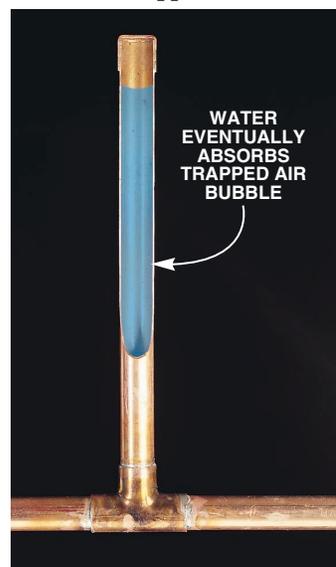
Prairie Home Products: (816) 761-3900.

\$8 to \$15.

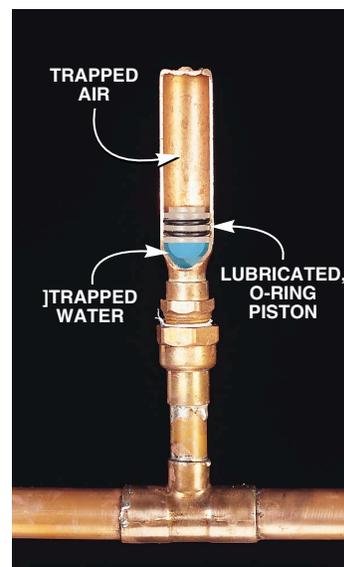
Sioux Chief Man: (800) 821-3944

### Types of Water Hammer Arresters

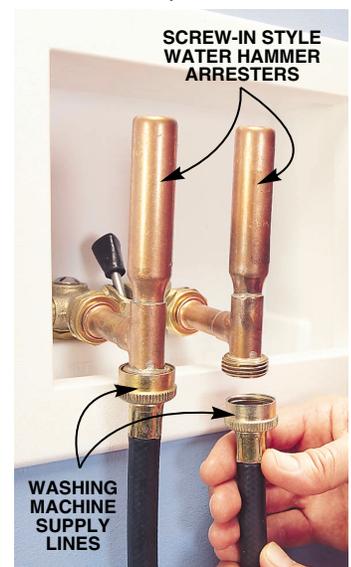
A. Vertical, capped



B. In-line



C. Screw-in style



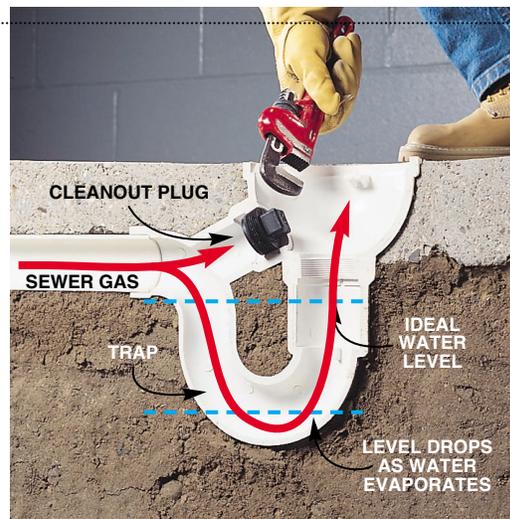
# Why does my basement smell like a sewer?

*I sometimes notice a foul sewer smell when I go into my basement. It has a primitive half bath that's used only in emergencies (I have three kids and only one bath upstairs). I've sniffed around but can't locate the source of the odor. Can you help?*

James Huit, Longstreet, CO

Here are the five possible causes in order of probability:

1. You have a water trap under a floor drain, laundry tub or wash basin that has dried out from lack of use. Water in any trap under unused drains will eventually evaporate. That would allow sewer gas to come up through the drain into the room. Solve that problem just by dumping a pitcherful of water into the drain to restore the trap water. If you follow that up by pouring a couple of tablespoons of cooking oil into the drain, a floating seal of oil will keep the water from evaporating so fast next time.
2. Check for a cleanout plug inside the floor drain. Remove the grate that covers the opening and make sure there's a plug inside the drain bowl. If the plug is missing, there's a direct path for sewer gas to bypass the water trap. Sometimes, the plugs are removed to clean sewer lines and not replaced. Buy a replacement plug at a hardware store.



3. It's less likely, but the water in the toilet trap also could have evaporated. Weeks of disuse could cause this. Of course, simple flushing will restore that water.
4. Another culprit could be a bad wax ring seal between the toilet flange and the base of the toilet. This wax ring can occasionally leak, sometimes because of a rocking toilet that has broken the seal. With a leak in this seal, sewer gas will find its way out from under the toilet. If that's the case, you'll have to remove the toilet and replace the wax ring. If the toilet rocks, use plastic shims between the stool and the floor and caulk the joint. This will ensure that a rocking toilet doesn't ruin the new wax ring.
5. A more serious prospect would be a broken or cracked sewer line or even a loose connection joint in the ceiling or buried in a wall. If you've addressed the four easier possibilities, use your nose to start investigating, starting with all visible joints. If you can't detect the leak, contact a plumber who specializes in hunting down leaks.

# Fogging up a clear window

*Our bathroom windows have clear glass. This means that the curtains are constantly drawn, limiting the natural light. Is there anything we can put on the windows that will let in the light but give us privacy?*

D. Sweeney, Bend, OR

If the windows in your bathroom are single-pane, you can apply a privacy film to the interior side. One user-friendly product we've tried costs 80¢ to 90¢ per square foot. It's a frosted privacy film that makes the window impossible to see through. The film takes careful handling but it requires very few tools (utility knife, spray

bottle and squeegee), and the company provides complete instructions. The product is supported by a total satisfaction warranty. For more information, contact Gila Products, Dept. TFH, P.O. Box 5068, Martinsville, VA, 24115; (800) 528-1290. Its Web site is at [www.gila.film.com](http://www.gila.film.com).

Installing this film on double-pane, insulated windows will void the manufacturer's warranty. If you're not concerned about the warranty and the glass cracks after you install the film, a window repair specialist can replace the old thermal unit with a low-visibility unit. But expect to pay \$150 or more to have the double-pane glass replaced in a small bathroom window.

## New Products



### World's cheapest bathroom expansion

If you're claustrophobic, large in stature, partial to showers-for-two or just plain tired of rubbing against the shower curtain, check out the Crescent Rod. This curved curtain rod replaces your old straight one and gives you a surprising amount of extra elbow room. The mounting hardware is simple and installation is straightforward; you can even use your existing shower curtain!

This product is available from Improvements catalog (product #205786) for about \$30.

Improvements catalog  
(800) 985-6044  
[www.improvementscatalog.com](http://www.improvementscatalog.com)



### New no-maintenance deck board

CorrectDeck is one of the latest entrants into the field of low-maintenance, composite deck materials.

- It's made from 60 percent hardwood sawdust and 40 percent polypropylene. The deck boards are 25 percent lighter and about 1/8 in. thinner than similar decking products.
  - It has a raised wood-grain texture, making it slip-resistant and more natural looking.
  - It comes in three colors—gray, cedar and natural—that fade slightly just like real wood. It can also be stained.
- CorrectDeck comes in 12-, 16- and 20-ft. lengths and costs about \$2 per linear foot.

Correct Building Products  
15 Morin St., Biddeford, ME 04005;  
(888) 290-1235  
[www.correctdeck.com](http://www.correctdeck.com)

# 7 Unexpected Ways That Fires Start

Most heart-breaking losses are surprisingly easy to prevent. This guide tells you how.



PAPER TOWELS TOO CLOSE TO STOVE

FLAMMABLES OVER STOVE TOP

TOWEL TOO CLOSE TO STOVE

GREASE FIRE

# 1 Cooking fires

The statistics: 23% of fires, 9% of deaths

## The problem

The grease in an unattended frying pan catches on fire and ignites nearby combustibles, which in turn ignite curtains, cabinets or anything else in the vicinity.

### A true fire story

Wausau, WI—A sleeping 4-year-old girl died of smoke inhalation in a house fire that started about 30 minutes after her mother left her alone to run errands. Apparently, a stove burner was left on under a frying pan containing grease used for frying chicken. She was the only person home at the time of the fire.

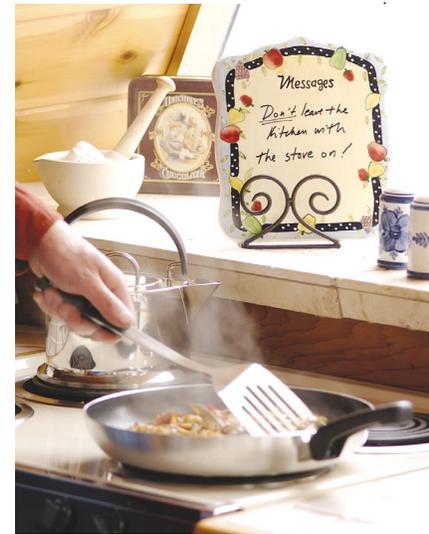
On average, every year one out of every eight homes will have a kitchen cooking fire. Cooking fires mostly occur on the cooktop, usually

in the first 15 minutes of cooking. A common scenario is an unattended frying pan on a hot burner. If a fire starts, don't carry the pan outside; slip a lid over the flames from the side to keep from burning your arm. Many grease fires become full-scale house fires when a flaming pan is carried through the house, dripping a flaming grease trail all the way to the door.

## The solution

- Never leave the kitchen while something is cooking on the stove.
- Keep combustibles at least 3 ft. away from the cooktop. This includes curtains and wall hangings.

**Tip:** Post a reminder note near the range for a week or two until everyone gets the message.



# 2 Electrical fires

The statistics: 9% of fires, 10% of deaths

## The problem

Overloaded extension cords, hidden electrical shorts, bad connections, and oversized bulbs and fixtures can ignite nearby combustibles and burn down your house.

### A true fire story

Florida—Fire and smoke spread through a single-story home, killing two in a late-night blaze. Investigators determined that an electrical short in a five-outlet power strip overloaded with seven appliances started the fire. Excessive heat melted plastic wires and ignited the carpet and a television stand. Crews doused the flames and removed a 74-year-old man and a 59-year-old woman from the home. The man had already died of smoke inhalation and the woman later succumbed to second- and third-degree burns.

Electricity and heat caused by shorts, overloading or bad connections go hand in hand. The heat generated is often enough to ignite combustibles such as wood framing, rugs or even the insulation around the cord or wire. While a few of the electrical causes are tough to spot,

there are telltale clues that can tip you off to dangerous concealed wiring hazards.

- Electrical cords that are warm to the touch can signal overloading.
- Charred or plastic burning odors may indicate oversized bulbs and light fixtures.
- Warm switch or receptacle plate covers may mean a poor electrical connection.
- Frequently tripping circuit breakers may be caused by a defective breaker or possibly a short in the cables buried in walls or ceilings.

## The solution

- Replace extension cords that are undersized or frayed.
- Never run extension cords under rugs.
- Replace undersized cords with larger-gauged ones or plug appliances directly into outlets.
- Call an electrician to track down hidden problems causing frequently tripping circuit breakers.
- Call an electrician to open up and troubleshoot electrical boxes that have warm covers.
- Check all the light bulbs in your home to make sure bulb wattages don't exceed the fixture's recommended maximum.



# 3 Heating equipment

The statistics: 15% of fires, 13% of deaths

## Smoke alarms

*According to statistics, this year fire will claim the lives of 30 of our readers and the homes of 500 others. Don't become part of this statistic. Well over 60 percent of house-fire fatalities occur in homes that are missing smoke alarms or have disabled alarms or have alarms with dead batteries. Test your smoke alarms every month and replace units that are more than 10 years old.*



### The problem

Wood stoves and space heaters igniting nearby combustibles are responsible for the lion's share of heating fires.

### A true fire story

Winston-Salem, NC—An electric space heater caused the death of a 3-month-old infant left at home with her brother and her two sisters early one morning, fire officials said. Manuel, age 11, smelled smoke in an upstairs room and was able to get two of his sisters outside but was unable to rescue his 3-month-old sister, who was asleep in the master bedroom. An electric space heater in the bedroom appears to have ignited a nearby pile of clothes. The mother was driving her husband to work when the fire started. A smoke detector had been installed near the kitchen, but the family took it down because it would go off when they cooked.

Most deaths from heating equipment occur when wood stoves and space heaters are in use and ignite nearby combustibles while everyone's asleep. Here are other common ways that wood stoves cause fires:

- If they're not disposed of properly, embers in discarded ashes smolder for up to two weeks and can ignite other trash.
- Chimney disrepair and creosote buildup can combine to create a chimney fire that can ignite adjoining wall framing.
- Sparks or even just heat can ignite combustibles that are located too close to the wood stove.

### The solution

- Keep space heaters at least 3 ft. away from drapes, bedding and other flammables.
- Plug space heaters directly into outlets, not into extension cords.
- Don't use space heaters while sleeping.
- Empty wood-stove ashes in a metal container and store them outside away from combustibles for at least a week before dumping them into the trash.
- Have your chimney inspected and cleaned every year.
- Keep any and all combustible objects at least 5 ft. away from the stove or fireplace.

**Tip:** Establish a designated space heater zone in rooms where space heaters are used. The zone should be clear of blowing drapes and at least 5 ft. away from other combustibles.



# 4 Candles

The statistics: 5% of fires, 3% of deaths

## The problem

Like cooking fires, most candle fires occur when candles burn unattended near combustibles—usually in bedrooms.

### A true fire story

Indiana—A 23-year-old woman and her two daughters, ages 11 months and 2 years, died when wind from an open window blew curtains across an unattended candle, spreading flames to nearby combustibles. The house had two smoke alarms, one battery-operated, the other hard-wired. Both were inoperable. Firefighters found the 11-month-old girl in a crib in the living room, dead from smoke inhalation and burns. Her mother and sister were found next to a bed, dead of smoke inhalation. All three had been napping when the fire broke out.

The recent popularity of candles and the 50 percent surge in candle-initiated fires in the last 10 years is no coincidence. Couple that with burning candles near combustibles or on shaky holders and there's a huge potential for a catastrophic fire.

Using candles safely calls for the utmost in attention and care. They're simply a high-risk item because you can easily set them near combustibles without noticing, leave them unattended and forget about them entirely. They'll often get soft and fall out of a holder and ignite nearby combustibles or even ignite an underlying wooden holder or shelf. (It's wishful thinking, but if I had my way, we'd only burn candles at the dinner table and nowhere else.)



## The solution

- Use only tip-proof containers.
- Burn candles only while you're awake and in the same room with them.
- Keep candles at least 3 ft. away from combustibles.
- Never burn candles that have combustibles (flowers, leaves and potpourri) cast into the wax.

**Tip:** Go through your candle and candleholder collection and throw away tippy holders and candles with combustibles cast into them.

# 5 Appliances

The statistics: 7% of fires, 4% of deaths

## The problem

After problems with stoves and heaters, the biggest culprits in appliance fires are lint in dryers and combustibles near gas water heaters.

## A true fire story

Portsmouth, VA—Clothes piled against a water heater started a fire that took the life of a 7-year-old girl. A neighbor who noticed the fire was able to kick in the back door and rescue five of the children ages 2 to 10, but dense smoke made it impossible for him to save the 7-year-old. The mother had gone to the store and left the children in the care of her next-door neighbor, who wasn't with the children when the fire broke out. A fire department spokesperson said, "There should be plenty of space between a water heater and any other materials," and "there should never be anything within two feet of any heating appliance."

Since water heaters are often in the same room as the laundry, clothes tend to get piled up against the water heater near the flame. The problem is worse when that flimsy cover plate falls off the burner access.

Dryer vents catch on fire when built-up dust and lint ignite from either the burners or the heating elements and create a fire path to built-up lint within the vent hose. Especially dangerous are dryers that are vented with



flexible vinyl hoses. The vinyl then catches on fire and lights anything near it.

## The solution

- Make sure protective water heater combustion chamber covers are in place.
- Pull the back service panel from the dryer cabinet and clean all the lint from the interior and around the drum. (We'll show you how in "You Can Fix It" next month.)
- Clean built-up lint from the vent line.
- Replace vinyl vent lines with smooth-walled metal ducts.

**Tip:** Mark a "combustible-free" zone 3 ft. away from your water heater with masking tape.

# 6 Smoking

The statistics: 5% of fires, 23% of deaths

## The problem

Smoking kills more people than any other cause of fire because the fires usually start when everyone's asleep.

### A true fire story

Minnesota—A man died after he fell asleep while smoking in bed. He awoke to find his bed and clothing in flames. Disoriented, he opened a closet and ignited the clothes hanging inside before struggling through the bedroom door and collapsing on the hallway floor where his clothes lit the carpeting on fire. He was pronounced dead at the scene and the fires were extinguished.

If a cigarette smolders in the bedclothes or drops on the carpet when the smoker falls asleep, the gases from smoldering fabrics will actually lull the smoker into a deeper and deeper sleep. Live butts that fall between cushions or are tossed into trash cans can take hours to



ignite, and when they finally do, the household's in bed, asleep.

## The solution

- Don't smoke in bed.
- Use large ashtrays on tables.
- Soak ashtrays under the faucet before throwing cigarette butts in the trash.

**Tip:** When nagging isn't doing the trick, it might be time to buy a sign like the one shown.



# 7 Children playing with fire

The statistics: 5% of fires, 8% of deaths

## The problem

Not only do children playing with fire start 5 percent of the residential fires; they're also the most likely ones to die from those fires.

### A true fire story

Tennessee—A 2-year-old and his 23-year-old mother died when a fire spread through the house. The children's 28-year-old father, who rescued his three daughters before reentering the house to search for his wife and son, also died. There were no batteries in the kitchen's smoke alarm.

The fire apparently began in a front bedroom under a bed. They believe that one of the children was playing with a lighter or matches and ignited a foam mattress. Flames then spread to the



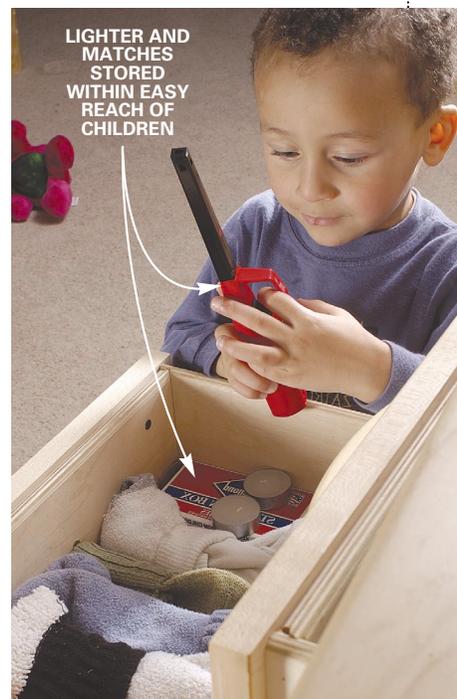
hallway, living room and kitchen. A padlocked door prevented the victims from leaving the home.

Children will often start fires while hiding in places like closets or under beds, where they're surrounded by combustibles. Their first reaction is often to hide from you or the fire after it starts.

There, they become overcome by smoke and/or make it difficult for firefighters to find them. It's obvious that you shouldn't leave matches and lighters lying around, but you also have to be vigilant around burning candles.

## The solution

Store matches and lighters up high, well out of the reach of children.



# RepairZone

## Window crank replacement

A disadvantage of the opener cranks on casement windows is that they jut out into the room and prevent miniblinds from hanging freely down to the windowsill. Take about 10 minutes and replace those standard handles with low-profile T-handles, available at most hardware stores and home centers.

To remove a standard handle, loosen the small set screw (Photo 1) on the underside. Before shopping for a replacement, check the window brand. Window

manufacturers make unique operator shaft sizes that won't fit other companies' window handles.

For about \$4, you should be able to buy stock replacement kits (containing two T-handles) that match your window brand.

Or, if you can't match your window brand, buy a generic replacement kit (about \$7) that has two T-crank handles and up to 10 adapters (Photo 2) that fit most window brands. Slip the adapter that fits over the operator shaft, slide the

T-handle on the adapter and tighten the set screw (Photo 3).

T-handles don't have the same easy opening action as standard handles and may be difficult for kids and some folks with arthritis to operate.

### Buyer's Guide

A source for generic T-crank replacement handles:

Prime-Line Products: P.O. Box 9910, Dept. TFH, San Bernadino, CA 92407; (909) 880-8968. Item No. H-3892.



REMOVE existing standard casement window handles by loosening the set screw with a small straight-blade screwdriver. (This set screw also may be tightened to secure any loose window handle.)



SELECT the T-handle adapter that fits tightly over the shaft of your window opener. A generic replacement handle kit comes with multiple adapters sure to fit your opener's particular shaft profile and size.



INSTALL the T-crank handle and tighten the set screw. Open the window by turning the handle counterclockwise. With the T-crank handle, window miniblinds will hang freely all the way to the windowsill.

# Loose door handle

Over time, door handles loosen and become difficult to turn and unlatch. Most door hardware made today uses exposed screws, accessible from the “room side” of the door, to connect the two halves of the handle to each side of the door. But some current brands (and most older door hardware) use hidden chassis screws (Photo 2), a setup that requires you to take the doorknob and rose (cover plate) apart to tighten the screws. Photos 1 and 2 show you how.

Our door hardware is fairly typical, but you may have something other than a button to release the knob. Also, some door roses unscrew from the chassis by hand (turn them counterclockwise) rather than snap onto it.



REMOVE the inside doorknob by locating the button (like our model), metal tab or wire clip on the side of the knob that acts as a release. Using an awl or small screwdriver, push the button in all the way—and at the same time—pull off the handle. Remove the door rose by inserting a small screwdriver into the small notch in the rose and twisting the tool to pop it off. Be careful so you don't chip any door paint.



TIGHTEN the door hardware by opening the door, squeezing both sides of the assembly together and tightening the two screws on the chassis. To reassemble, snap the rose back on the chassis, depress the release button and slide the knob back on until the button pops through the hole.

# Squeaky floor fix using caulk



LOCATE the floor squeak and inject polyurethane caulk into gaps between the joists and plywood. Ventilate the area while using this caulk.

Squeaky floors are one of those irritants that homeowners endure for a long time before undertaking the repair. There's a whole hardware doodad industry devoted to solving this problem. Each set of floor conditions favors a particular remedy. Here's one fix: When the floor framing in your house is accessible and there's a slight gap between the top of the floor joists and the subfloor, try using polyurethane caulk (about \$4 per tube) to silence the squeak (Photo 1).

Inject the caulk into the gap and work it deep with a plastic spoon so the caulk flows toward the nail shanks that are causing the squeaks (Photo 2).



PUSH the bead of polyurethane caulk deeper into the flooring gap with a plastic spoon instead of your finger. This caulk is extremely sticky. Wear gloves when handling it and expect that any tools you use to work the caulk will have to be cleaned with paint thinner, or in the case of the spoon, just thrown away.

# Do asphalt seal

## Female Do-it-yourselfers Hammer!

True or false? 1) Nearly half of all home-center purchases are by women. 2) More women would rather spend their leisure time on a home-improvement project than shopping at a mall. 3) Nearly 65% of women plan on doing a home-improvement project within two or three years.

If you answered "true" to all the above, you're tuned in to one of the biggest trends in home improvement. Women are involved in 90% of all home-improvement decisions, and tackling project in record numbers. A current survey showed 54% of women are in the process of planning a home improvement project. The most popular? Painting (32%), landscaping (32%), wallpapering (21%), tiling (15%) and installing light fixtures (13%). And everyone from tool companies to work glove manufacturers are creating products directed toward women.

One company, Tomboy Tools specializes in finding, developing and selling tools that are lighter, fit smaller hands and geared to female DIYers. The company even offers in-home workshops. Its motto is "No pink tools." Find more information at [www.tomboytools.com](http://www.tomboytools.com).

## How We Live

- Americans spent 163 billion dollars on remodeling and repairs in 2002.
- Sixty-seven percent of Americans own their own homes, an all-time high.
- Two-thirds of all major home improvement projects are done by do-it-yourselfers.
- Based on a survey, the average cost of a kitchen makeover by National Kitchen and Bath Association members is \$36,000. About 40% of their jobs cost \$25,000 or less.
- Americans spend an average of 35 minutes per day in the bathroom; 42% read in the bathroom; 16% have telephone conversations and 17% sing in the shower. Fifty percent take showers every day and more than 6% take more than one shower a day.
- The EPA estimates that air in most new homes is likely to be 2-5 times more polluted than outside air. Americans spend about 90% of their time indoors.

*I apply asphalt sealer to my driveway every spring. My neighbor laughs at me and tells me it's nothing but black paint. Do sealers actually help a driveway last longer, or do they just make it look better?*

**W**ELL, IN SOME WAYS your neighbor is right—but comparing asphalt sealer to paint isn't necessarily bad!

Both products protect outdoor surfaces from sun and moisture damage and therefore, while surely cosmetic, prolong the surfaces' life. But just as paint won't fix rotted siding, sealers won't save a crumbling driveway.

When asphalt is new, it's flexible. As it ages, the oils in it oxidize and degrade, making it brittle and more prone to crazing. Asphalt is also porous. In cold climates, moisture works

into these pores as well as the mini-cracks that have formed, expanding and widening them and popping out the surrounding material. Rain, also, can seep through cracks and wash out the supporting base material. This sets up a vicious cycle of ever-widening cracks. Sealers fill these cracks and pores, speed water runoff and help slow the cycle.

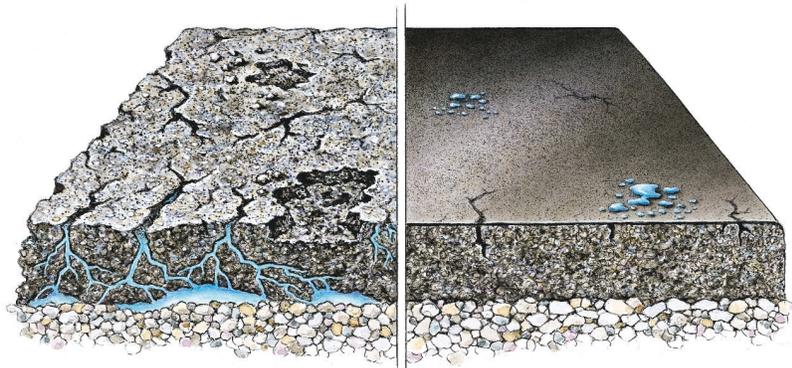
Not all asphalt sealers are created equal. You can buy thin sealers that are mostly cosmetic, or choose heavy-duty sealers that fill cracks and create a durable topcoat. Like good

**You can overdo a good thing. Too many coats of sealer can crack and peel—just like too many layers of paint.**



# ers really work?

## GreatGoofs



A vicious circle can form as an asphalt driveway ages. Small cracks form, allowing in water, which then freezes and expands, creating ever-widening cracks. In severe cases, water can even erode the underlying subbase. Asphalt sealers keep out water, oils and salt, helping a driveway last longer.

paint, good sealers contain less water (which simply evaporates) and more solids, which form the actual protective coat. Good sealers have more additives, often latex, which increase flexibility, and often more sand, which helps trac-

tion and adhesion. The two-, four- or six-year protection claims on labels are good for comparing products within a product line, but don't take them literally. A Midwest driveway that gets plowed, covered with road salt and subjected to freeze/thaw cycles will need more frequent sealing than one in a moderate climate.

There are different formulations too. Coal tar emulsion sealers do a better job than asphalt emulsion sealers of resisting gas, oil, brake fluid and other petroleum products that "melt" asphalt. But depending on where you live, you may not have much choice. Coal tar reigns in the East, asphalt emulsion in the West.

Sealers labeled "easy stir" are better in that they keep the solids suspended longer so the application is more uniform. Inadequate stirring is the No. 1 cause of a lousy job.

With the best stuff at \$20 per 5 gallons and the cheapest at \$10, the price difference is less than \$30 for a 15 x 60-ft. driveway. Buy the good stuff. For more details, contact the National Pavement Contractors Association ([www.pavementpro.org](http://www.pavementpro.org) or 940-327-8041).

### I told you so!

Several years ago, my wife and I decided to build a new fence along the property line. My wife insisted that I call the local utilities (gas, phone, water, etc.) hot line before I dug the



holes, saying, "After all, it's just one number to call and the service is free." Well, I never got around to it and started digging the fence postholes. All was fine until I got to the last post. I jammed the digger down and hit something that felt like a rock, so I gave it another hard thrust. Oops! I could hear hissing out of the pipe and smell gas rising out of the hole. I told my wife and she notified the neighbors and the gas company. Needless to say, I felt about 2 ft. tall as they all gathered across the street looking at me standing by the hole as the gas truck came rushing up the street. I could see my wife staring at me and mouthing the words, "I told you so!"

## Tips for a top-notch job

1. Fill cracks wider than a pencil lead with pourable or caulkable crack filler. Fill potholes with blacktop patching material.
2. Sweep your driveway, scrub it with soapy water, then rinse it. If you have fresh oil spots, hit them with an asphalt primer.
3. Apply two thin coats instead of one thick one. The sealer will bond better and dry faster.

### Fan-tastic!

We moved into our 1917 house in the middle of July. It was a hot summer and the first thing on our agenda was to install ceiling fans in a few rooms. I got the parts I needed and went at it. I had the typical problems you have in an old house, so I ended up working past midnight to get the job done. The next morning my wife was the first one out of bed. I heard her go into the kitchen. She knew I was awake and exclaimed, "Oh, what a great-looking ceiling fan." I yelled back, "Turn it on." A minute later, I heard a quick series of loud thuds. I ran into the kitchen and immediately saw the problem. My wife had opened the large pantry door right into the spinning fan blades. The fan now shakes a bit like Carmen Miranda, even after I relocated it and rebalanced the blades.

# State Farm ad