

# HOMEXPERT

Simple ways to improve your home comfort, safety and value.

Winter 2008 \$3.00

## MY WORD

### Pocketbook Friendly

By Steven Heidler & Mick Heidler



Dear Friend,

Been hearing much about “change” lately? I sure have. There’s the change in government, of course, but that’s just one thing making the news.

I’m hearing that the highs and lows of gasoline prices have changed how we drive. What about you? Did you “rethink” that Summer vacation a few months ago? The economic times have changed how we do our shopping. Are you feeling that, too?

Good grief – even television is changing. Come February, all the television stations in the country are switching from analog to digital, and that rabbit ear antenna from days gone by won’t even get you a fuzzy picture anymore!

Energy costs have changed how we think about the utilities in our home. Small acts of conservation and energy-efficiency are becoming routine – like changing your thermostat setting to a few degrees less and changing your

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## MONEY WISE

### When is a Water Heater Like the Space Shuttle?

When it’s flying through the air? When it’s shooting flames from its nether regions? When the explosion not only breaks the sound barrier – ok, comes close – but also turns your basement into the backyard extension you’ve been meaning to get to? So far none of these things sound like appealing options for your home....

\* For water heaters installed more than five years ago, a qualified technician should perform a yearly inspection. This not only ensures your water heater performs at peak efficiency, it also allows for the early detection of leaks.

\* Keep the thermostat of your water heater between 120°F and 130°F. Overheating tanks can cause corrosion. Not only that, but overheating consumes unnecessary energy dollars.

\* For gas heaters, check the flue once a year to make sure it is clear.

### Stay Out of Hot Water

In the next year, more than 5 million tank-type water heaters in the United States and Canada will fail, most with little or no warning. Here are a few simple steps you can take to make sure that yours isn’t one of them:



\* Open the drain valve at the bottom of your tank every six months. Let the water run until it looks clear – usually around 5 gallons. This prevents sediment buildup in the tank.

\* Test the temperature pressure build-up annually. You can do this by lifting or depressing the pressure release and draining water from the overflow pipe.

### A Little TLC Goes A Long Way

Water heaters are like any other appliance. They require routine maintenance and they will eventually wear out. (Give us a call and we can set your maintenance to be automatic.) Unfortunately, the “out of sight, out of mind” mentality most homeowners take to their plumbing can lead to serious damage and shorter life spans for equipment.

You can save thousands on repairs and damage with just pennies. Not a bad deal, don’t you think?

## INSIDE...

- Make Windows Work for You
- The Plastic Meltdown
- Winter Whittles Your Lawn Away

**Your Quick Call Comfort Hotline:**

**410-268-7191**

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## The Plastic Meltdown

It's so quick, so easy – and costs Americans thousands of dollars each year in interest and fees. Sure, a credit card may seem like a quick fix to a cash crunch, but if you want to avoid a personal financial crisis, there's only one thing to do: cut the cards and do your best to get out of debt.

### Who, Me?

According to the American Bankers Association, one in six families with credit cards pay only the minimum due each month. In other words, these families are simply trading water. Though getting out of debt can seem overwhelming, it's also a must for anyone who dreams of financial freedom. Luckily, this is the land of opportunity...

### What to Do

- ◆ **Pay bills on time**, and pay more than the minimum due. In 2004, a survey from the Cambridge Consumer Credit Index revealed that 42 percent of Americans with outstanding credit card debt are either paying the minimum or making no payment at all. Missing payments should never be an option, since that could trigger a much higher interest rate or even force an account into collection.
- ◆ **Make a list of purchases.** For many people, debt is a reflection of spending on items that aren't necessities. By writing down expenditures, you'll be able to see just why it is you're in debt, and where your budget could use a little tightening.
- ◆ **Seek help from lenders.** If debt has indeed become overwhelming, contact lenders to see if they will consider lowering their interest rates as you try to get back on track. Many people are surprised to find that lenders are often receptive – and it doesn't cost anything to ask.

## Make Your Windows Work for You

The thermostat is turned up, the heater is doing double time to keep you warm and cozy...but there's still a chill in the air, and it could cause frostbite to your budget. See, even if your home comfort system is doing its job, there are nooks and crannies around your home where cold air can creep in.

One of the most common culprits is the space around your home's windows. Thinking that's not such a big deal? Some estimates predict that heat loss through windows accounts for 35% of your Winter energy costs. At more than a third of your energy bill, it's worth paying attention to. And since there's plenty you can do to prevent the heat loss, that's actually good news...



**Check for leaks** – A good way to check for leaks around windows is to use a piece of thread to see where the strongest draft is coming from. Once you've determined where the draft (or drafts) are coming from, you can address those leaks immediately.

**Remove old caulk** – A window

that's caulked may appear to keep in heat when it's actually not. Caulking can crack, which allows significant heat loss around the window. As soon as you notice cracks or anything that appears to be damaged, go ahead and replace the caulking.

**Accessorize your windows** (My spouse loves this one!) While some might be more aesthetically appealing than others, curtains, shutters, blinds, and shades all keep heat inside your home while minimizing the amount you'll lose.

### Update your windows

– Chances are, the older your home is, the less energy efficient its windows will be. If you haven't already, consider getting new windows. Replacement windows are more energy efficient, easy to install and actually easier to operate.

You might also want to consider storm windows, which are essentially an extra layer of window designed to keep more heat in. Though not as easy to install as replacement windows, do-it-yourselfers should have minimal problems, if any at all.

## DID YOU KNOW

- ❖ All pet hamsters are descended from a single female wild golden hamster found with a litter of 12 young in Syria in 1930.
- ❖ *"The Mouse Trap,"* by Agatha Christie is the longest running play in history.
- ❖ Hawaii is the only US state that grows cocoa beans to produce chocolate.
- ❖ In 1938 Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel sold all rights to the comic-strip character Superman to their publishers for \$130.
- ❖ The characters Bert and Ernie on Sesame Street were named after Bert the cop and Ernie the taxi driver in Frank Capra's "It's A Wonderful Life."

## Don't Let Winter Whittle Your Lawn Away

You may miss the heat and outdoor adventures of the Summer, but at least Winter brings welcome relief from the hassle of lawn duty...right? Not exactly. While mowing and weeding may move to the back burner, there's still plenty to do to get your lawn ready for the months of shorter days and lower temperatures...

### Less is More

Ok, first things first: clean up the yard. Sure, many people feel that leaves add to their lawn's seasonal and aesthetic appeal. But the truth is, leaves that aren't raked can actually suffocate the grass beneath. (I know, it seemed strange to me, too.) If that weren't enough, consider this: diseases that can affect a lawn are more likely to occur if leaves are trapping the grass. Could someone please pass a rake?

Leaves aren't the only thing you want less of. You'll also want to cut the grass a little closer than usual. In general, professional landscapers suggest the final mow of the season should be about a half-inch shorter than you normally cut. You'll reduce the likelihood that two unwelcome houseguests – mold and mildew – will set up residence in your lawn.

### Keep Evergreens Green

It seems redundant. Aren't evergreens always green? Well, no. Ever notice how your evergreens tend to brown once spring comes around?

Wonder why that happens? It's because of a process known as desiccation.

Basically, the trees dry out over the Winter because of sun and wind exposure. And since the ground is frozen, the trees can't get that lost moisture back. To avoid such a fate for your evergreens, wait as long as you can before giving them one last heavy watering for the season.

### Baby Your Trees

When exposed to bright sunlight or excessive heat in the Winter months, newly planted trees can die. This process, known as sunscald, can occur when the temperature fluctuates quickly. This often happens on those random days in Winter when the temperature might be warm in the sun during the day, but returns to sub-freezing once the sun goes down at night. Newly planted trees can be protected from possible sunscald by wrapping their trunks in burlap or plastic wraps – just check your local lawn care or hardware store.

**...final mow of the season should be about a half-inch shorter than you normally cut...**

### “Quotable”

*“If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”*

– Percy Bysshe Shelley



## Prepare Your Vehicle Now for Winter Travel

Some people anxiously await the first few snowflakes of winter, while others dread below-zero mornings and icy commutes to work. No matter how you feel about the cold, the reality is that it can take its toll on your vehicle if you don't take the right precautions...

**Motor Oil Musts** Engines work harder in winter. That's because oils and greases become thicker when it's cold. Over time, friction and impeded fluid flow can contribute to engine wear. For cold months, you may want to consider synthetic oil rather than conventional motor oil. Many synthetic motor oils still flow or pump at temperatures up to sixty and seventy below zero. Plus, synthetics have a broader service range than traditional petroleum.

**Avoid Frostbite for Your Vehicle** Make sure you check antifreeze levels and the effective working temperature of the product you're using. Otherwise you risk a cracked engine block, blown hoses and water pump failure from frozen, expanded water in your vehicle's systems.

Propylene glycol-based antifreezes provide excellent protection against freezing and are safer than ethylene glycol antifreezes, and don't have the sweet taste and smell that lures pets to the ethylene glycol variety.

**Battery Basics** As temperatures drop, so does the efficiency of the battery. In very cold weather, your battery's power output can be diminished to as little as 10%. It doesn't help that batteries also lose power as they age. Think about replacing your car battery sooner rather than later – there's no time like the present to get your vehicle powered up!

## MY WORD (...from page 1)

home comfort system filters on a regular basis.

Preventive maintenance is still a great way to maintain the life of your system and improve energy efficiency. But when it's time for a change there, the logic of "green friendly" products, these days, is making them very "pocket-book friendly," too.

### HomePoints

The most common plumbing repair caused by cold weather is replacing hose faucets. Avoid this by disconnecting all garden hoses from the hose faucet.

So, with all this change, isn't there anything that's staying the same? Yes, in times like these, we need our friends more than ever. And we're still here to keep serving our friends. What can we do to help? Let us hear from you. Whenever you need us, you'll find us waiting for your call.



Steven Heidler & Mick Heidler

P.S. Remember, your friends are our friends, so please pass along our name. And pass along this newsletter, too!

## There's Only One Thing Worse Than A Flooded Basement...



And that's knowing it could have been prevented. Having your plumbing system inspected and serviced before times of increased use can save time, hassle – and thousands of dollars in unwanted repairs. Call Heidler, Inc at 410-268-7191 today.

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## Never Take a Cold Shower Again

Well, not unless you want to. The Forever Hot Water system lets you enjoy an endless supply of steaming water whenever you want – and reduces your energy bills to boot!

How? With traditional water heaters you pay to reheat the same water again and again – even when you're not using it. With Forever Hot Water you pay to heat the water when you need it. And it never runs out! So call us today and find out how you can start enjoying endless hot water – and savings! – now.

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