

# HOMEXPERT

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

Fall 2008 \$3.00

## MY WORD

### Renewing the Renewable

By John R. Hrubos



Hello Friends,

Interesting times indeed. Gas prices have soared through the globally-warmed roof.

Again. "Green" products are everywhere. Heck, if you're not touting something green, you're almost socially irresponsible. (Yes, we have many green products available and have for years.) The "link" between gas prices and going green seems to be Ethanol, that corn-based "renewable" fuel. Think of that...

Our planet does many things well. (That's a good thing, because where would we go if it didn't?) One of my favorites is the change of seasons, and fall is mighty special. Some elder definitions of "Autumn" include "a period of maturation or decline."

I don't completely agree. We get the new school year, fashion season, car models, and television programming. There's much "renewed" in fall. The cool snap in the air surely renews my desire to get indoors! Whether you agree or not, there's no debate.

Autumn signals the approaching year-end. The calendar is getting

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- Got Gutter Clutter?
- Home Remodeling
- How To Get a Raise

## MONEY WISE

### Is Your Toilet the Biggest Loser?

Put That **Greedy** Fixture on a Water Diet

It's hot and you're filthy. Of course, that's what you should expect when you spend the morning digging up weeds. But you're finally ready to grab a shower and call it a day...except that when you turn the tap, the faucet remains dry. The water is simply...gone.

Good thing that's a figment of your (or maybe my) imagination. But in truth, the growing population is putting stress on available water supplies. Between 1950 and 2000, the population nearly doubled. However, in that same period, public demand for water more than tripled. This increased demand has put additional stress on water supplies and distribution systems, threatening both human health and the environment.

#### The Culprit

According to the EPA, residential toilets account for about one-third of the nation's indoor household water use – more than 2.1 billion gallons of water a year.

If your home was built prior to 1992, when the federal government began mandating low-flush 1.6 gallons per flush (gpf) toilets, your existing bathroom toilets greedily consume 3.5 gpf. If your home dates back to the 1950s or earlier, you may have a water-guzzling 5.5-7 gpf model.

#### The H2O Diet

"Too much of a good thing" definitely applies to the amount of water being wasted. That's why the EPA developed the WaterSense labeling program, designed as a win-win – both for consumers' wallets and the environment. Here's how:

- The program will educate the public about smart water choices.
- WaterSense promotes efficiency without compromising comfort or performance.
- Qualifying WaterSense toilets will save 20% more water than current models.

Saving water by installing high-efficiency toilets is a great way to make a local difference that can have a global effect. With this one home improvement, a family of four will save an estimated 25,000 gallons each year. So if you want a little help keeping your water running on high and not dry, give us a call.



**Your Quick Call Comfort Hotline:**

**273-8122**

**www.benfranklinithaca.com**

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## Got Gutter Clutter? *(Squishy carpets are a clue!)*

When Autumn rains fall, many homeowners get the unpleasant surprise of finding water has leaked into their basements or ground floor. But the solution could be very simple: clean your gutters. If gutters are clogged with leaves and debris, they can't do their job of moving rainwater away from the house. To keep gutters operating properly – and to protect your investment – try these tips:

- ◆ **Think safety** – Always use a solid, good-quality ladder to reach your gutters. Safety glasses and gloves are a good idea, too. And watch out for power lines.
- ◆ **Use the right tools for the job** – In addition to something to contain gutter debris, you'll also need a tool with which to scoop it out. The patented Gutter Getter Scoop from Working Products, Inc. is a good option. It's shaped to fit all gutters and keep your hands away from the debris. And don't over-reach or you could destabilize your ladder and cause a fall. Instead, consider using a special tool to extend your reach. The Gutter Grabber is a cleaning tool on an extension pole that lets you clean up to 18 ft. of gutter without moving the ladder.
- ◆ **Check the downspouts, too** – If the spout is clogged, a coat hanger can serve as a tool for working the debris out of the spout. Follow that with water from the garden hose to flush out debris. Covering your downspout with a strainer such as the Gutter Getter Big Top Downspout Strainer will help reduce future clogging, too.

## What Home Remodeling Project is the Best Investment?

It's no secret that home sales are a bit off. Okay, that's like saying that Simon Cowell is a bit blunt. So, instead of "moving up," lots of homeowners are "staying put" and improving their property.

Some of the more popular upgrades are bath upgrades, office additions, and kitchen remodels. Each of these has been painstakingly researched by Forbes Magazine, and here's the scoop...

### Midrange Bath Upgrade:

Fared pretty well at 94% ROI. But hey, what's it worth to NOT have to look at that stupid shag toilet cover and gross faucet?

### Office Addition:

Ranked lower than we'd have guessed at just 73% ROI. Yet when you consider that your home-based job is supposed to generate a profit, that should more than even the score.

**Kitchen Remodel:** The low and mid range remodels did better than the 'higher end' versions (98% vs. 91%). This is a great ROI, and in some neighborhoods the ROI can be 105%, which ought to make the head chef very happy indeed. So let's take a look at a good remodel...

- Cabinets are generally the most expensive part of the remodeling project. With the number of styles, material and hardware available today, you can have a custom look without a custom price tag. Also, refinishing your existing cabinets can provide an updated look.

- Consider one of the new luxury, laminate countertops rather than solid surfacing or granite. You could have money left over for the stainless steel appliances you want.

- If you want the look of stainless appliances, but aren't ready to pay the price, consider ordering basic appliances with front "trim kits." You can apply a metal or laminate look-alike panel to the fronts of refrigerators and dishwashers, and you've got the look for less.

You can save by removing existing cabinetry and countertops and painting the room yourself, but it's usually a good idea to leave electrical, plumbing and installation work to the experts. (Give us a call and we'll be happy to review the options that are best for you!)



## DID YOU KNOW

- The phrase "Goodbye" originated from "God bye," which is derived from "God be with you."
- The game "Simon Says" was originally known as "Do This, Do That."
- The fear of teeth is referred to as **Odontophobia**.
- Golf results in more deaths than does playing any other sport.
- A crooked nose used to be considered a **sign of leadership** in ancient Rome.

## Top 6 Ways to Save Money and Breathe Healthier Air

It happens every Fall. No, not a long line of strangely dressed – and painfully awkward – round of “celebrities” being bounced off Dancing With the Stars, but the Government’s recommendations to weatherize your home. And they mean your home. Their reasoning is simple – the more this country saves on energy, we become less dependent, better off financially, and better stewards of the planet. Not a bad outcome.

And every Fall, I yell – I mean “suggest” – that you take a hard look at saving more of your energy dollars too. Of course, there are financial and health considerations. Let’s take a look...

### The Science

In the last several years, a growing body of scientific evidence has indicated that the air within homes can be more seriously polluted than the outdoor air in even the largest and most industrialized cities. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), people spend approximately 90% of their time indoors, especially during the cold winter months.

Measures such as installing storm windows, weather stripping, caulking and blown-in wall insulation can reduce the amount of outdoor air infiltrating into a home. Consequently, after winterizing, concentrations of indoor air pollutants from sources inside the home can increase.

### The Source

Most homes have more than one source that contributes to indoor air pollution. Some of these sources can include smoke, dust, pet dander, radon, mold and other pollutants which can pose serious health risks and contrib-

ute to respiratory disease, asthma and even lung cancer.

Fortunately, there are steps that you can take both to reduce the risk from these existing sources and to prevent new problems from occurring. Here are some tips to consider:

**“most homes have more than one source that contributes to indoor air pollution”**

- ▶ Operate bathroom fans, if present, to remove moisture from showers (fans should be ducted to the outside).
- ▶ When a wood fire is present, a window should always be kept open – especially in a tightly sealed, energy efficient house.
- ▶ Invest in a quality range hood that will offer high-performance ventilation in the kitchen from every day cooking.
- ▶ Install a carbon monoxide detector on every floor of the house.
- ▶ Make sure a home’s roof and windows are in good shape. Water leaks, condensation and elevated levels of humidity may not be visible, but moisture in interior wall spaces can encourage mold growth and structural degradation.
- ▶ For optimal air quality, invest in an air exchanger system that will both filter out harmful pollutants and distribute fresh tempered air throughout the home.

### “Quotable”

*Admiration for a quality or an art can be so strong that it deters us from striving to possess it.*

—Friedrich Nietzsche



## How to Get a Raise

You have been laboring away at the office and are still receiving the same salary you earned when you first walked in as a clueless newbie. So, today looks like the perfect time to demand a raise. But there is a very specific technique to follow when requesting a raise.

**Is it really the perfect time?** “Timing is everything” is frequently advised but you should really be listening this time. If you demand a raise with reason, but on the day your supervisor discovers that the company is in debt, the request could likely have a reverse effect. The best time to ask for some more hard-earned cash would be after your boss commends you on your work or after you’ve accomplished a big project. It will be much less painful for him to let you reach your hand into his pocket in these scenarios than any other.

**Be prepared for backfires.** The boss is likely to not let you run off with some extra money without really proving yourself. You can expect him to ask a very general “Why”? That is when you *better* know specifically why you deserve a higher salary. It would be smart to go into these situations with at least an idea, if not a detailed script, of what points you are going to highlight. You certainly don’t want to be pulling words out of thin air here.

Make sure that you know what it is you’re talking about...Where will this raise put you on the earnings scale in your office? If you stroll into your supervisor’s office demanding a raise that will put you above your superiors, you might get laughed at.

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

mighty thin. Somewhere in there this means I've gotten a year older, which means I'll be advised to "watch my diet and exercise" to ward off accelerated aging. (Sound like someone at your house?)

Preventive maintenance is good, I guess.

My house needs a little fixing, my car needs some tending. My wardrobe could use an update. (No comments please.) Fortunately, good maintenance is better than full and costly replacement. Here's where you expect – and will get – a nudge from me about keeping your plumbing in tune.

But for the living and irreplaceable things – like the earth, you, and your family – good maintenance is the only prudent path.

Here's to the health of all,

P.S. Want us to send this issue to a friend? Just call us and it's done! So many great articles, they're bound to thank you!

### HomePoints

Turning off the water while washing your car can save more than 100 gallons of water each time.

## 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 **Benjamin Franklin Plumbing** at 273-8122 today.

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## Here's Your "One Call" Plumbing Solution

- **24-hour Service, 7 Days a Week.** Why wait for more water damage?
- **Professional Plumbers.** Our skilled techs can solve most any plumbing problem. Like yours!
- **Fast Effective "Drain Relief."** We send water away. Quickly, cleanly.
- **Water Heaters Repaired or Replaced.** Sometimes you want to be in hot water! Get it!
- **Over 12 solid years** of caring service. Let us solve your problem.

Call **Benjamin Franklin Plumbing** at 273-8122.

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## High Energy and Utility Costs Tanking Your Budget?

It's a sad truth, but one you face every day – the costs of energy and utilities continue to rise with no end in sight. It can be hard to enjoy your nice hot shower when it's costing you a fortune.

But thanks to new technology, your budget doesn't have to be "tanked" to give you the comfort you crave. Tankless water heaters are more efficient than traditional models, cutting water and energy use to save you money. Plus, you get instant hot water that never runs out!

Give us a call today at **273-8122** and schedule your FREE water heater inspection. We'll let you know just how many of your hard-earned dollars could be going back where they belong – your pocket!

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