

From the Desk of ...

Choosing a Plumber

By Jerry Griffin

You come home from a weekend trip to find that your toilet has erupted in a volcano-like manner. In desperate need of a plumber now, you grab the yellow pages, flip open to "Plumbing," and dial the first number



Jerry Griffin

you see. Three days later, the contractor arrives, looks blankly at the funky factory that was your toilet, and leaves. He needs parts ... he needs tools ... he needs a four-hour

break. Shouldn't a plumbing professional arrive at your home equipped, ready to conquer the problem? I say to you, absolutely.

As an industry veteran, I am often asked what qualities to look for when hiring a plumber. Luckily, a good plumber is as easy to spot as a bad one, when you know what to look for.

Before you even consider inviting a plumber into your home, the first thing to confirm is professional licensure and insurance. A plumber with a license is a professional who has met state qualifications. Proof of insurance shows that they'll cover a mishap. Believe me, in this business, you'll want that coverage – in case it's your bathroom that gets covered.

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Plumbing Your Palace

Egyptian plumbers may have had it right 5,000 years ago when they installed copper plumbing in pharaohs' palaces. In more recent history, iron and lead pipes were protocol, but over time it became evident lead pipes leached toxic levels of lead and iron pipes rusted. Copper was then rediscovered as a safe, effective channel for transporting water. Until the mid-1970s, virtually all hot- and cold-water plumbing was copper.

Though copper has remained the "gold standard" in plumbing for the past 25 years, developers searching for a less costly alternative began installing CPVC (chlorinated polyvinyl chloride, a.k.a., petroleum-based plastic) pipes in new homes. Since then, there has been an ongoing debate about which material to use: Copper or CPVC.

CPVC pipe does have benefits. It is extremely lightweight and easy to install. In areas with aggressive water, CPVC is an attractive option because it does not corrode regardless of water conditions. It is also non-conductive, meaning it won't become hot to the touch when hot water flows through. Also, CPVC is not conducive to sweating, which eliminates the need to insulate pipes. Of course, the most compelling reason for choosing CPVC pipe is cost. You can expect to pay up to 44 percent less than other options, but should your decision be based solely on upfront cost?

While CPVC pipes cost less to install, you should also consider that copper increases the value of your home. This is especially important if you are planning to eventually sell your home, as prospective buyers will look for copper pipes as a sign of quality.

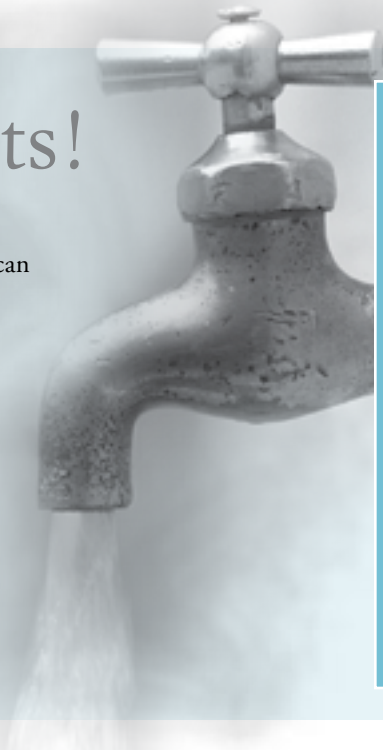
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Ouch, That Hurts!

While scald prevention is a big deal for those with young children or the elderly, anyone can be seriously injured with water temperatures in excess of 120 degrees. That's why it's important to have a professional plumber check your system and control the temperature so it's hot enough to sanitize while cool enough to be safe. Some houses, however, have systems that cannot be effectively controlled by simply making adjustments to the hot water heater. In this case, it is imperative to have a scald prevention device installed. These valves temper the water that reaches end-point fixtures, such as faucets and showerheads. Many variables must be considered when installing a scald prevention device. Please be sure to consult a professional.



Did You Know?

- Scalding accounts for 20 percent of all burns.
- Most recent construction must adhere to anti-scald codes, which do not govern older buildings' hot water levels.
- Each year, more than 2,200 children in the United States are scalded.

Choosing a Plumber

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In the event of a plumbing non-emergency, take the time to ask for references and make phone calls. Satisfied customers are valuable and will speak volumes.

Take these steps before you have a dire need. Have a plumber in your rolodex or address book that is licensed, insured and has references. Don't resort to making a blind call when you're most vulnerable.

When you've made an educated choice and it's time to schedule a service call, the plumber should arrive in a punctual manner, sport a badge and be in uniform. A written estimate is crucial and should include a timeline with the total price and a breakdown of labor and parts.

The plumber should arrive at your home with the tools necessary to complete most – if not all – of the job. Good plumbers drive a fully stocked truck. Of course, a complicated job might require a specialty part, which the plumber should order immediately and return once for installation.

Upon job completion, you shouldn't have to request a detailed invoice. Before paying the bill, review it carefully to ensure that you've received what was promised. Help keep good plumbers in business! If satisfied, tell your friends and neighbors, should they ever come home to a nice surprise. ■

Use Your Senses

Water Taste and Smell

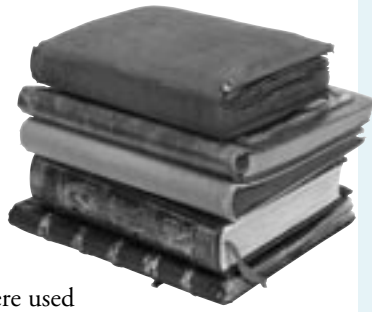
Pure water is completely clear, tasteless and odorless. Most city water is treated with chemicals that can render contaminants harmless, but can also add undesirable flavor to the water. Refer to this chart for possible causes and solutions. Most problems can be detected through either taste or smell.

TASTE	POSSIBLE CONTAMINANT	WHAT TO DO
Bitter	Bicarbonates	Correct pH levels – 6.5 to 8.5 is ideal
Metallic	Iron, Manganese, lead or any metal	Perform reverse osmosis or cation exchange for the whole house
Salty	Sodium Chloride or an inorganic salt	Same as above
Chemical	Pesticide	STOP using the water completely

ODOR	POSSIBLE CONTAMINANT	WHAT TO DO
Chlorine	Chlorine or Chloramines	Systemic activated Carbon filtration
Detergent	Foaming agent	Same as above
Fish	Barium, Cadmium or Organic matter	Water softener with ion exchange
Rotten Eggs	Hydrogen Sulfide Gas	Carbon filtration and chlorination

While your nose and taste buds are useful in detecting the problem, most water contaminants can be dangerous to your health. Consult a professional to help you identify and safely remove contaminants from your water.

A Highly Abridged History of Plumbing



- 2500 B.C. Egyptians installed bathrooms in burial pyramids just in case the dead needed a rest stop during the journey to the next life.
- 1500 B.C. On the isle of Crete, islanders enjoyed flushing toilets and freshwater sewage systems. Cisterns were used for rainwater collection and storage.
- 400 A.D. Rome had 11 public baths, 856 private baths and 1,352 fountains and cisterns.
- 1600 A.D. English castles had indoor privies, which were dumped into the moats that encircled the castles for protection.
- 1778 A.D. Joseph Brahma patented the flushing system, which is principally the same mechanism used today.
- 1848 A.D. A plumbing health code was enacted that most of the world still follows. It required every home to have a flushing toilet, ash pit or privy.
- 1876 A.D. George E. Waring Jr. published *The Sanitary Drainage of Houses and Towns*, which incited revolutionary reforms in the way human biproducts were disposed.
- 1880 A.D. The British developed toilet paper.
- 1883 A.D. The National Association for Master Plumbers was formed, setting a much-needed precedent for professionalism in the plumbing industry.
- 1911 A.D. Kohler developed the first one-piece recessed bath.
- 1937 A.D. Moen designed the one-spigot faucet, mixing hot and cold water.
- 1968 A.D. The Jacuzzi was invented, named after Candido Jacuzzi. He developed the concept after his 15-month-old son developed Rheumatoid Arthritis, and he sought a way to alleviate the baby's pain. ■

Plumbing Your Palace

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Even with no plans to sell, copper certainly has its advantages. Most important are those related to health. Copper is biostatic, which means it inhibits bacterial growth and is less likely to contain a buildup of minerals making the water that flows through safer to drink.

The most contested argument against using CPVC-based pipes is that it has the potential for transmitting dangerous, inorganic chemicals into drinking water. Some say that while this would be true for PVC, its non-temperature resistant counterpart, an increase in temperature does not cause any molecular breakdown. Others ask why, then, does hot water from CPVC pipes taste like plastic?

Of course, the choice is yours. Conduct a cost-benefit analysis for each, but know there are many factors to consider. Invite a professional to your home to test variables like acidity, proximity of pipes to living quarters and hot-water temperature, which can all make a difference in which pipe material best suits your needs. But if you want to build your own palace up to a pharaoh's standards, copper is your answer. ■

Get Your Snack Out of the Gutter!

Mmm, mmm, mmm ... Next time you ponder munching a cookie at your office desk, consider taking it to the toilet seat instead. Might as well: According to a recent University of Arizona study, 25,000 bacteria per square inch wait to colonize your cookie at your office desk. Eat off the toilet and risk the company of only 49 bacteria per square inch of the seat. Surprised?



In public places, toilet seats are usually disinfected daily. Office work areas are rarely wiped down, and some keyboards have never even seen the nozzle of a disinfectant can. When we eat at our desks, we inevitably leave some trace of food. This provides a breeding ground for bacteria that can make us just as ill as those that cause colds. Moreover, people loom around office work areas for many hours, coughing, sneezing ... you name it. The bathroom is a "get in, do your business and get out" sort of place.

The moral of this story is not to start an office trend of toilet-seat dining. It is: Don't wait until you can see or feel the dirt on your desk, keyboard or phone. Spray down your work area with a commercial-grade disinfectant daily and dramatically reduce its bacterial load. Most importantly, wash your hands as often as possible, as they are the accomplices to the bacterial assault of almost any surface. Finally, stop eating at your desk. We probably didn't have to tell you that though.

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Expires September 29, 2006

Water, Water Everywhere

By Les Strous

Water can be a very powerful force, often underestimated until it's too late. Even a seemingly minor drip from an untightened trap or a water line can lead to serious problems. Sometimes, as in the case of certain molds, the issue is virtually invisible. Luckily, most leaks leave clues that will warn you to contact a professional before the problem becomes permanent.



Les Strous

Look for the Following:

- **WATER STAINS.** The source of the water is most likely outside if stains are around windows or doors. Your roof is almost certainly the culprit if stains are on the ceiling, but also know the source of the leak isn't necessarily right above the stain. Water stains around your plumbing fixtures usually mean there is a leak somewhere in your plumbing system.
- **STRUCTURAL INDICATORS.** If your floor begins to buckle – even slightly – this is compelling evidence that water is somewhere it doesn't belong. Hardwood floors show a presence of moisture with cupping around tongue-and-groove joints. Around bathrooms, be especially leery of any areas where water damage may occur from a splashing shower, or even from people simply stepping out and dripping on the floor. Drywall will reveal water damage by becoming discolored and swollen.

If you think you have spotted a water leak, but aren't sure of the source, contact a plumber. Professionals have sophisticated water detection tools that can locate the problem, even in the most discrete places. ■

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