

Checkups for Your Appliances

by Tim Burr

“Too much. That is the problem with most appliances,” Skip Giddens told me. I had called him at Skip’s Appliance Service because our dishwasher was leaving the dishes dirty and spotty. “Too much detergent, too many clothes in the washer, too much dust under the fridge, too much lint in the dryer.”

He told me how to check the dishwasher. “The next time you finish a load of dishes, restart the empty dishwasher with no detergent. After it fills and starts to run, stop it and look inside. If the water is soapy, you’re using too much detergent. In that case, run it three or four times with no dishes and no detergent until the water looks like you could drink it. Then make sure you only use a little bit of detergent from then on.”

“Should I fill the detergent container half full?” I asked.

“Less. Two or three teaspoons only. Or get these tablets of dish washing detergent that companies are now making. You’ll be surprised at how small they are.”

“Also make sure to let the water run in the sink until it is hot before you push the start button. Cold water could leave the dishes cloudy.”

Skip said it was important to make sure that the screen at the bottom of the dishwasher was cleared of debris. “If it is grungy, take it out, scrape away the food, wash the screen, and put it back. The air gap, that thing that stands up at the back of your sink on the dishwasher side, may need to be cleaned, too. Some you can clean yourself, but some you can’t, with an amazing imitation of Old Faithful if you do it wrong. If getting rid of the extra detergent, running the water until it is hot, and clearing the screen don’t improve your dishwasher’s cleaning abilities, you may have to call on the appliance repair person for the air gap. The main reason it, and the screen, gets clogged is because people don’t rinse their dishes before putting them in the dishwasher. Do it, even if your machine’s instructions say you don’t have to.”

Another thing to do regularly is turn the shutoff valve off and on for the dishwasher, washing machine, and ice maker. “Do it about every two months so you know they’ll work in an emergency. There is nothing that will ruin your day more than finding a lake in the kitchen or the area around the washer and no way to shut the water off.”

Skip also has some comments about the way people use their washers and dryers. “Don’t throw in some extra detergent to make the clothes cleaner. It just means the clothes don’t get rinsed, and that can make them get dirty faster. Overloading with clothes can leave them dirty. And it can also lead to small items getting into the pump with expensive results. I had to replace a pump because a thong had gotten wrapped around it.”

On dryers, Skip said the biggest problems are “overloading and not cleaning the lint trap. If you put in too many wet clothes, the dryer works too long. Some things are over dried and others aren’t dry at all. As for lint, it can cause a fire. Clean the lint trap every time. I pulled one lint trap recently, and the lint in there was about the same consistency as dry paper maché. And about as flammable. No air was getting through. If a small to medium load takes more than an hour to dry, you need to have your vent cleaned. Don’t wait. Houses have burned down from lint catching fire.”

Tom Joray of Joray & Company said: “Dryer vents should be cleaned at least every couple of years. This includes inside the dryer, through the whole vent pipe – making sure it is safe – and out the exterior cover. This is job for a professional. But you can keep our job to a minimum by thoroughly cleaning the lint filter every time. And periodically, use the narrow tool from your vacuum to clean out the area where the filter goes. That will get rid of some of the tissue that was in your pocket.”

Skip on refrigerators: “Leave room inside for air flow. Clean any vents or drains. Not only will

that help to keep the food cold, it will also take care of smells. And clean the coils under the fridge on a regular basis. You can buy a long-handled brush at the hardware store. Take the front panel off at the bottom, brush the coils, then vacuum the area out. The dust acts like insulation making it hard for the fridge to cool. You'll not only keep your fridge going longer, you'll also save on your electric bill."

"The main problem with microwaves is crud. You can build up a good layer of grease in them. Clean the inside regularly, and don't forget the top. That's where the grease collects. If the top is dirty, when you cook something for a long time, the grease gets hot and then you'll have arcing and sparking."

And the garbage disposal? "Don't overstuff it. If it stops, **turn the switch off**, clean out the garbage using tongs, and use a flashlight to make sure there aren't any spoons or other hard things inside. Then push that little red reset button on the bottom. When you flip the switch, with the cold water running full force, it should work. You can avoid some hard things dropping in and making a horrendous noise by keeping them away from the opening. Don't balance rings near the sink. They can bounce when you turn on the disposal and commit suicide inside. If you do hear a loud noise, shut the disposal off *immediately* and check to see what has fallen in. I have pulled out everything from diamond rings to good silver to beer pull tabs. Don't put them in or near the sink!"

Tom Cash of Barry Plumbing added to the list: "Twisties, bottle caps, screws, fruit pits, and plastic. Plastic will stop it almost every time. And don't put too many potato skins, rice, or fibrous vegetables like celery and onion bottoms in the disposal. Also grease. It will cork the pipes up. The main reason to use cold water every time is both to keep things flowing and to cool the disposal. While it is an electric motor, it is water cooled. Use hot water, and it can burn out."

I listened to all of this and did some checking. We were in pretty good shape for most of the tips. With my head hung in shame, however, I admit that our dishwasher was soapy when I checked it.

We ran it about six times to get all the soap out. Now we use the little dishwasher pills. And our dishes are clean and spotless.

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