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November 8, 2010

DICO Fall 2010 Newsletter



There is a chill in the air and the beautiful colors are painting their mirror image on the lakes. What a beautiful time of year; apple picking, pumpkin hunting, cider donuts, crisp fresh air and lots of leaves ...

Sorry to take you out of dreamland, but these beautiful leaves are not only nice to look at, they are falling onto your yard, roof and into your gutters. We still have a few more weeks before they are all off of the trees, but when the trees are bare, be sure to clean your gutters! That's usually just around "turkey" time, before they get frozen into your gutters. Also be sure to put a few other fall chores on your list. Some of them are:

1. **Shut off** all exterior hose faucets from inside, then go outside and open those hose faucets up and leave them open all winter. We don't want those pipes to freeze!
2. **If you** have forced air heating, change your air filters. We recommend high micron pleated filters with a filtration rating of "Merv8". 3M Company makes a great filter that does not reduce air flow. Check them out at your local hardware store or go online to www.filters.com. Click on household filters and then furnace filters. 3M Filtrete filters should pop up. Make sure you know your replacement size before going on the computer or to the store!
3. **Do you** have a humidifier on your furnace? If so, now is the time to clean it out. Take the cover off and either clean the evaporator pad or replace it. To clean it, place it in a bath of white vinegar. That's right – the same stuff you put on lettuce and potato salad. It is acidic acid, which dissolves calcium. Calcium is the white crud that is clogging your filter. Not only is vinegar great in salads, it's great for cleaning your shower heads, faucet aerators, soap scum and calcium build-up on shower doors and in toilets. If the evaporator pad is so bad that it's now falling apart, purchase a new replacement one from your local hardware store or online. Be sure to keep the plastic frame and only throw away the evaporator pad. It would also be wise to write down the name and model number before going to the store or ordering it online. If you go to the store, you

could bring the plastic evaporator pad frame with you for a perfect fit and no second trip to the store.

4. **Oh you** have steam heat... Well then, neither #2 nor #3 applies to you and if you have forced air, you can skip reading #4 and continue at #5. Steam heat is one of the oldest and one of the most comfortable heating systems still in use today. The first thing you need to do is to flush out your low water limit. If you have a McDonnell & Miller float type low water limit, there is a drain handle at the bottom of this device which is usually on the right hand side of the boiler. With the boiler turned on, hear the flame; open up the drain valve using a metal bucket to catch the hot water running out of this device. About a quart to a half-gallon of water should flush out of the low water limit and then the boiler will shut off. That worked? Good the low water limit is working properly. If water drains out of the low water limit, but the boiler doesn't shut off, the float is hung up. Sometimes you can hit the side of the low water limit with the plastic handle of a screw driver and it will pop the float inside free. If not, you will have to call a service technician to free it. If no water comes out, then it's completely clogged. Again you need to call the service technician. But if you want to try to clean the sludge out of it, I have been successful using a coat hanger. Open the drain valve and use the single wire of a coat hanger with a tight hook bent onto its end and push it up into the valve. Most of the sludge is inside the top of that drain, so once you have broken through it, the clog will drain out and you have saved yourself a \$200.00 or more service call. If you have an electronic probe low water limit, it has no drain valve; you don't have to do any maintenance. Now that the low water limit is done, you need to drain the sludge out of the bottom of the boiler. Turn the power to the boiler off. That's usually a red switch next to the boiler or at the top of the basement steps. With the boiler off and cold, or at least cool, open the drain valves at the bottom of the boiler and at the bottom of the wet return pipe. Drain all that chocolate milk looking water out of the boiler. Flush it out with some fresh water added by turning on the fill valve. After flushing, fill the boiler up with fresh water, until its level is at the water level mark on the boiler or if there is no mark, then a little bit above the half way mark on the sight glass. I always add "boiler treatment" to my fresh water. It takes the oxygen and minerals out of tap water and adjusts the ph. Most good plumbing supply houses like Caldwell Plumbing on Central Avenue, in Caldwell (973-226-9127), carry it.
5. **If you** have a fireplace, and haven't had it inspected in several years, now would be a good time to call a licensed chimney sweep to check it out. Everybody likes a nice fire around the holidays. It's also an emergency heating system in case we get a bad winter storm that knocks the power out for a few days. Be sure to only purchase as much wood as you are going to use this winter. You don't want to keep a lot of firewood around the house. Firewood attracts rodents and termites when left on the ground.

Want to cut your energy consumption?

How thick is the insulation in your attic? An adequate amount is approximately 10 ½ inches of fiberglass which has an energy rating of R-30. Amounts of 12 ½ inches or even 14 inches with ratings of R-45 are even better. The second largest place for energy loss is the box beam or band joist area around the outer perimeter of the basement at the top of the foundation wall. Installing 10 ½ inch thick chunks of insulation in this area will cut heat loss. Seal any openings between the sill plates and the foundation with caulk or a plastic foam spray like Great Stuff. Most home centers and hardware stores

carry it. While you are in the basement, look for any openings leading from the basement into the attic or even to upper floors such as around sewer pipes. This allows warm air leakage into the attic and also allows fire to spread more quickly. Seal these openings with fiberglass or rock wool insulation without any paper backing. If the opening is small, a foam spray like "Great Stuff" will work.

On the exterior of your home check the caulking around the perimeter of windows, doors, Freon and gas pipes and water hose fittings. If the caulk is deteriorated, remove the old caulk before applying the new. The caulk I like to use is "Lexel". You can purchase it from a good lumberyard or Ace hardware stores, but I haven't seen it in Home Depot or Lowe's. Caulking can save \$350.00 per year in energy. (www.houselogic.com)

I recently installed foam gaskets that go behind receptacle and switch plates. I put them on all my exterior walls. If these exterior wall openings are not sealed, you could be losing as much energy as if you had left a window open. They are cheap and easy to install.

Check your thermostat. Is it a set back thermostat? Is it working correctly? Is the correct time set on its clock? Always turn your thermostat down when leaving your home. It will always save energy no matter how long you will be gone. A good energy saving temperature range is 68°F when occupied and 60°F at night or when unoccupied.

If you have a hot water heater, hydronic, heating system, a neat energy savings upgrade is to have your plumber or a good heating contractor install a "Modulating Aquastat" on the boiler. This device has an exterior temperature sensor that adjusts the boiler water temperature according to the outdoor temperature. It's telling the boiler "It's only 55°F outside, so the house will be adequately heated with boiler water at 95°F rather than the normal 130°F boiler water" and you save money!

Another energy saving tip to do before the cold weather sets in is to get your clothes dryer vent pipe cleaned out. Your clothes will dry faster saving money and energy and you will be removing lint, which is a fire hazard.

Willy Dittmar to Speak at December Workshop

Here's a glimpse of the press release regarding the upcoming informative and fun event.

Paul's Motors Sales and Service will be hosting a winter home and car care clinic in their new car showroom on Saturday, December 4th from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon. "This is an ideal time to pick up tips on how to save on energy costs and add value to your home before the winter cold sets in," said clinic organizer Diane Korzinski who has sponsored seminars at her family owned Volvo dealership which has been located in Hawthorne since 1920.

Featured speakers include DICO Building Inspection Service, Inc, President, Willy Dittmar, who is a walking encyclopedia on home care. "I've never met anyone who knows more about houses than Willy. He is amazing," says Korzinski who offers the course free to the general public as a

community service and has done so for the past 25 years.

Other speakers included Guinness World Book of Records holder for highest miles on his car Irv Gordon. According to Korzinski Gordon's 1966 Volvo P1800 has close to 3 million miles on it. "That's a lot of driving experience--if anyone knows how to maintain a car and drive in all kinds of weather it's Irv," she added.

Barry Morse of Volvo Cars will also be on hand to give winter driving tips and how to keep your car energized during the winter months. Other presenters will be on hand to talk about keeping healthy in the winter and how to drive safely with your pet.

"We try to have offer something for everyone. However we are really excited about having Willy here. This will be our first home clinic and I think it is really timely. We all like to save money," concluded Korzinski with a smile.

As an added convenience, Paul's will be offering \$ 29.995 oil changes during the clinic and a free winter inspection for your car. Please reserve a spot for the clinic and/or the service by calling (973)427-2530, or visiting www.paulsvolvo.com.

Now for some Fall trivia!

"Honey, is it okay to eat this?" Every wonder how long you can keep an unopened bottle of ketchup on the shelf? Here are some guidelines from the Virginia Coop Extension Service.

Coffee: 1 year unopened, 2 weeks opened on the shelf, 6 weeks opened in the freezer.

Instant Coffee: 6 months unopened, 2 weeks opened.

Salad Dressing: 1 year unopened, 3 months opened and refrigerated.

Spaghetti: 2 years if placed in an airtight container, 1 year on the shelf.

Solid Shortening: 8 months.

Ketchup: 1 year unopened, 1 month opened in the refrigerator.

Crackers: Unopened 3 months.

Soup Mixes: 1 year.

Canned Foods: 1 year.

Rice: 2 years in sealed container.

Peanut Butter: 6 to 9 months unopened, 1 month opened.

These statistics make you wonder if it's wise to purchase those mega sized packages of food that are not

going to be consumed quickly.

Best time to go grocery shopping? Between 9:30 AM and 2 PM on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. That's when the crowds are small and all the shelves are newly stocked.

If you have to go ... the best time for a doctor's appointment is the first morning appointment available. Provided he/she is not running late, you'll get in and out before the doctor starts falling behind and the pileup starts.

Miscellaneous Statistics:

The average American driver spends 38 hours a year stuck in traffic.

In the past four decades the daily distance driven rose from 21 miles to more than 32 miles.

In 1969 nearly half of American children walked or biked to school. Now only 16% of school children walk to school.

The size of the American family has fallen, but the number of cars has increased from one to three.

Men honk their horns more than women and drivers are more reluctant to honk at you if you are driving a nice new car. Go figure!

Aggressive driving is on the rise and here are the basic principles that may help:

Don't Offend

Make sure you leave enough room to merge carefully and use your turn signal. If you are cut off, proceed slowly and let them merge into your lane.

Only use the left lane for passing. Do not impend the flow of traffic. If someone wants to pass you let them.

Do not tail-gate. Allow a two second space between you and the car in front of you. If you are being tailgated, signal, pull over and allow them to pass.

Avoid offensive gestures and refrain from making motions that might cause the other driver to get angry, even something that might seem harmless to you, like shaking your head.

Don't Engage

Keep distance between your vehicle and theirs. Do not pull over and try to "settle" things between you and the other driver.

Avoid making eye contact. This can start a personal duel.

Call for help if you feel threatened. If you don't have a phone, drive to a busy area and

Don't try to win. Allow plenty of time for your trip and make good use of your commute by listening to soothing music or a book on tape.

— ~~Try to imagine yourself in the other driver's shoes.~~ Perhaps it is a volunteer fireman or someone rushing to the hospital.

If you think you might have a problem, ask for help. Anger management classes can help drivers to 'reinvent' their approach to driving and help prevent them from getting angry.

From all your friends at DICO ...

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