

Seven stupid things people do that ruin plumbing

By Philip Schmidt, Networkx

If you're looking for a career change and want something with rock-solid security, you might consider becoming a plumber who makes house calls. This advice is based on two truths: 1) People will always need plumbing — or more specifically, plumbing that works — and, 2) people will always do stupid things that stop their plumbing from working.

Keep in mind that the service side of plumbing often requires a strong stomach and the will to suppress amusement with other peoples' self-imposed misfortune. But rest assured that the two truths mentioned above will always keep you in business.

The items below are just a small sampling of what you might expect on an ordinary day in the field.

1. Leaving hoses connected during winter

This is a classic plumbing error that one must assume is caused most often by extreme laziness. Unlike holiday lights, hoses can cause damage when left out all year: They can lead to freezing of the sillcock (outdoor faucet) or its water supply pipe. It's terrible for your hose, too.

2. Using too much drain cleaner

When used judiciously and as directed on the right kind of clog, drain cleaners can be effective and relatively safe for drains.

When used with abandon, they can corrode some drain materials, and they can actually make clogs worse. It's also not very nice for the plumber who eventually comes out to clear that clog.

3. Pouring household chemicals into a septic system

If you're used to living with a "private" sewage system, you probably know how to take care of it. But if you just bought a house with septic, or maybe you're renting a rural cottage for the summer, you might not think twice about using chemicals like drain cleaner, chlorine bleach, paint, and even anti-bacterial soaps.

These chemicals kill the essential waste-eating bacteria in the septic tank, and you can guess the result. Also, be careful about grease (see below) what else you put into a septic system.

4. Screwing, nailing, or cutting into a wall with hidden plumbing pipes

Now we're into the realm of "Oh, yeah. I did that once." Do this with a screw, and you might hear a fine spray of water hitting the back of the drywall. Do it with a reciprocating saw, and you're in for a gusher.

5. Pouring grease down the kitchen drain

If you're in the habit of pouring bacon grease down the kitchen-sink drain, you might as well try to stuff the whole pig down there.

Grease is one of the best things for clogging drains. (So is all the soap we use in the bathroom, but that's a harder habit to break.)

6. Abusing the garbage disposal

Even if you're not drain grease in the sink, you might be one of those folks who thinks a food disposer (garbage disposal) is the equivalent of a space-fantasy ray gun. It's not.

It's a motor with a spinning wheel that has two metal teeth thingees, and it does very little to stop the following from clogging your drain: flour, rice, potato peels (and some other veggie peels), and many fibrous foods such as asparagus and chard.

7. Using the toilet as a trash can

We all know it's stupid, and we all do it anyway. It's as though, at the back of our minds, each of us believes that if we can just get it to flush away, it will be magically out of our lives forever.

As if, at the other end of the toilet, there is nothing but a black hole, a portal to a subterranean outer space that swallows up everything we discard and whisks it off into oblivion. Unfortunately, that oblivion is a 3-inch drain pipe that leads into another drain pipe, which is THE drain pipe to your entire house.

In other words, flushing one improper item down the toilet ultimately can stop up everything in the house. But we do it anyway. And the bottom line is, if it ain't toilet paper (or you-know-what), it doesn't belong there.