

50plus Handyman



Geyers and Plumbing

50plus Handyman director Roger Runswick discusses Plumbing disasters and how to avoid them.

With an untypical UK summer leaving the UK alternatively under several feet of water or on the verge of a full scale drought we look at plumbing disasters and how best to avoid them. Firstly the edited high lights of two recent calls to the 50plyus Handyman booking lines.

The waiting game

Customer - I have a bulge in my kitchen ceiling. It's been there a while but now it's getting bigger and there's been water dripping from it and this morning it's dripping a lot faster.

Yes Madam: what is on top of the kitchen?

Customer: 'the bathroom'.

Madam; can you turn your water off?

Customer: 'I think so'.

Madam. Do it now and then call us back.

'Hello? 50plus? Can you repair holes in ceilings?'

A bad valve day

Customer: I was trying to repair a ball valve.

Yes Sir. How can we help you?

Customer: 'Well my internal stop-cock was stuck so I turned of the water in the street.'

Yes Sir, quite sensible. But how can we help?

Customer: I think I turned off the wrong stop cock. When I took off the ball valve off the water wouldn't stop.

Oh dear! What's the current position?

Customer: Well I jammed the ball valve, ran outside and now everything is turned off but I'm not sure what to do and my neighbour has no water.

Have you tried the other stop cock sir?

Customer: Well I did but now it's stuck

We're on our way Sir.

So we can all chuckle in retrospect, not least because the insurance company's usually pay up (but not in the case of street stop cocks. They are the Water Company's and they may charge you). But in these albeit rather extreme cases either not waiting before taking action or testing before starting would have avoided disaster. So what else can one do?

In the first instance do not let systems deteriorate. 50plus Handyman sees two very common problems, which end up costing the customer far more than they would have done if addressed at an early stage.

- (i) Leaking showers. These are a perennial problem. The biggest issue is the old style all to flexible plastic shower trays mounted on upper floors. The tray moves with people's weight. Sealant is dislodged or traps/pipes become loose and there's a damp patch on the ceiling below. Don't leave it too long or don't use the shower. It won't fix itself. And if changing the tray fit a solid stone cast type.
- (ii) A dripping tap can easily fill a bath full of water in a day (every day). If you are on a meter it's costing you money. It is also costing us all money as water 'down the drain' has to be stored, pumped and the infrastructure paid for. A tap washer or new tap insert is a good investment and the sooner it's changed the less it will cost, particularly in hard water areas where the constantly running water will erode the tap base.

And finally, a dark plumbing tale. A customer reported not have any water coming out of a bath tap. Every other tap was OK. Our intrepid 50plus Handyman turns off the customer's hot water and having ruled out more obvious causes dismantles the tap. What's that in there? Some careful extraction later and we have a (rather dead) bat. How did it get there? The tank was covered. We'll never know, but next time the water's running slowly, perhaps better to just shrug and call the plumber - quickly.

A short while ago in a residential home which had best remain as 'somewhere in the South of England' 50plus Handyman was called in to fit a replacement pump into the well of a lift shaft. Questioning why the lift shaft had water in it resulted in a shrug and a reply that it had been there for a few years. Once an inspection was finally arranged and the lift made safe our intrepid Handyman climbed down into shaft a found that he could have had a bath in water for it was very hot. Much pipe tracing and digging later a group of pipes under the floor in the lift equipment room were revealed with a rush as a fountain of hot water hit the roof. Simple - fix the leak. But wait - why is there a pump on the hot water system? Is it because there was not enough pressure (not surprising given the attempt to recreate the Roman Springs at Bath in reverse). But even with the pump backed off and now no leak we now find that hot water is bubbling its way into the cold water tank. Aha - is that non-return valves we see, right next to the boilers. Are they working. Well probably not but just think of the drain down time (to give you an idea we are talking 20 residential rooms and a second cylinder here). OK - brainwave! Leave the existing and probably permanent) non-return valves in and fit some new ones in the loft near the header tank. Brilliant! Job done. But no what is this! When we turn the water back on there's no hot flow in the nearest bathroom, Aha! Is that a safety mixer valve we see. Yes it is. Try adjusting it - there we go, water. Hot water. Very hot water. Adjust, try again. OK no water, at all. Thump it, with a spanner, OK a big spanner. OK - an on off valve controlled by thumping it. How many are there? Nobody knows. And when were the water temperatures last checked? Good question but no answer.....And why is it that the pump in system is not for hot water but for central heating...and....the saga continues.

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