

10-14-11 Equipment and Armor

(Or: Hats, Shoes, Tools)

I admit it; my car looks like that of a hoarder. Maybe I need an intervention. Or maybe a bigger car. Or maybe I need to learn how to “Just Say No”. Well, not an absolute refusal but maybe something more along the lines of “You’ll have to make an appointment with Peggy. She handles my calendar.” That instead of “Oh, dear, I’ll get out there to look at that right away!” Or instead of, “Oh, sure! We can make an appointment for a perc test!” And, “Okay, sure, I can go there for a final inspection around 9:30.”

So, I went to the final inspection. I grabbed the septic design plans. Sneakers came off and boots went on. The inspection went well. We talked about the height of the cover and the location inspection port, considering that part of the system would be covered by the re-paved driveway. As I said goodbye to the installer, I added, “I’ll go and look at some dead fish now.”

So, I looked at the dead fish and brought my camera. I went back to the office to place the pictures on the computer and send them by email to DPH. No, my phone does not take pictures and it’s not a “smart” phone, either. Most of the time I like my “dumb” phone, as it keeps life simpler. But, I’ll have to admit that when I need to quickly send a picture or wish that I could send an email while out in the field, I start to get envious of those who can.

Then I received a call about mold. So, I went to look at that and brought my camera and some zip lock bags and hand wipes because this was an outdoor mold situation and a very interesting one, too. You’ll hear more about that situation in the near future, when I know more about the cause of the mold.

Back at the office, I read a lengthy description, transcribed by Peggy, of a phone conversation with a tenant about a rental property with mold in the lower level, missing screens and sliding doors opening to thin air; only a few feet of thin air but still, no steps? For that visit I brought the housing inspection bag and the housing inspection clipboard. That bag has a voltage tester for the outlets, a moisture meter, face masks, gloves, tape measure, small calculator, flashlight, the Minimum Standards for Housing, Chapter II, 105 CMR 410 (Code of Massachusetts Regulations) and inspection forms. And the digital camera came along, too, as it has become an essential means of communicating and documenting.

Then I received a call about the temperature being off in a food establishment. So, I brought my food establishment bag and my food establishment clip board. After all, I wouldn’t bring my perc test bag and perc test clipboard into a food establishment! Not only do they have different things for different tasks, the perc test things get dirty and kitchen things need to be clean.

You see, what happens is, when you are the health for a small or midsize town, you are the only health agent. And that means we become a “Jack of All Trades”. In the larger towns and cities, the agents usually specialize, with one for housing, another for food establishments, another for environmental issues. It is hard to believe that the huge Town of Middleboro had only one health agent not too long ago. How well I remember the newspaper article written about ten years ago describing a day in the life of Jeanne Spalding as the only health agent for Middleboro. She went from a perc test, to a restaurant inspection, to a nuisance complaint and back to the office to return phone calls. We not only wear many hats, we frequently change shoes and boots.

Speaking of boots, it is time for me to put my waders back in the car. Each fall there’s a special project requiring some samples of the Monponsett Ponds. On that day, I’ll wear the wader boots and bring sample bottles and barbeque tongs. I found a long pair of tongs that perfectly fits the sample bottles, allowing me to dip the bottle into the water without reaching my arm down into the pond the way I used to. Considering that the water will be tested for E. coli and that it is usually green with algae, I decided last year to order some long gloves.

The day the gloves arrived, I was eager to open the box and check them out. As I tried one on, I cracked up laughing, for they went well beyond my elbow! As someone from another office walked by the door and saw me admiring my new gloves, she said, “I don’t even want to know what you are going to do with those!”

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You might have to make an appointment with Peggy but I’ll get there. Just give us a heads up as to what is going on, so that I can be properly equipped and outfitted.