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Squeegee for Thee

Have you ever noticed how health concerns tend to come and go in trends? Why is that? Do we play copycat? Are we hardwired for social psychology and we don't even realize how easily others affect us? And what brings about the diminishing of one trend and the rise of another? It is all so very interesting to watch and contemplate.

While some health concerns may receive less notice as another stands in the limelight, the formerly attended to issues still exist; if they were real issues, that is.

I am sure you recall the attention given to mold in recent years. The media acted as though mold was something new and very frightening. Businesses jumped on the bandwagon and offered cleaning, water proofing and ventilation remediation services. Environmental scientists created power point presentations and business brochures for their air quality testing services.

Health agents may be glad that some of the hype and panic has faded but we also know that mold, mildew and moisture problems are real and must be dealt with. The State's Sanitary Code requires health agents to assess and determine whether or not conditions of chronic dampness exist. This applies in particular to rooms that are partially below grade or have some source of moisture, such as a leaking window or wall. The same code requires property owners to provide some sort of ventilation in bathrooms. The ventilation can be as simple as a window or it can be an electric fan that pulls air to the outdoors through the wall or up through the attic space to the outdoors. It cannot vent to the attic, where it will only create a moisture and mold problem.

Several years ago, when the mold scare was at its height, health agents were scrambling to respond to all the calls of concern looking for guidance and the calls of complaints from tenants claiming it was the fault of the property owner that there was mold in the house. At first, the situation seemed complicated. We learned about various types of mold. We learned about the health problems caused by mold. We heard from scientists as to the causes and solutions.

In the end, we arrived where we began. Mold was not new; mold was old. Mold could and should be prevented. It is easier to prevent than to treat. People should not be living underground (in cellars). People and their environment need fresh air and sunlight. Tenants have responsibilities. Property owners provide fans and windows. Tenants need to use the fans and open the windows. They also need to wipe down walls and clean up bits of mildew as it occurs. We all need to do that, whether or not we own the property.

Finally, we had received clear, common sense guidance on how to handle the code, the owners and the tenants.

That simple guidance was useful when I remodeled my bathroom. After twenty-one years and six children, the bathroom had seen better days. One observation led to another and the next thing I knew, I was planning its remodeling. That was when I became very motivated to maintain the value of a costly renovation. What could I salvage? What needed to be replaced? What problems, such as moisture, could be handled differently?

I was determined to find a better way to prevent moisture-related damage. Should I return to wiping down walls with a towel, as my father taught me? I left that method by

the wayside years ago, with the conclusion that my father probably did not take care of the additional laundry resulting from washing all those towels. So, instead of soaking up the moisture, my determination led to the rediscovery of an inexpensive and easy method for handling water on surfaces: the squeegee. This simple device was once a family favorite. I'll have to take a survey and find out if my siblings are still fans of squeegeeing away water from shower stall walls. (There's a reason why window washers use this quick method!)

The squeegee cost me one dollar at the Dollar Tree store. I thought, "For one dollar, why not give it a try?" It takes a couple minutes to scrape away the sheets of water clinging to the ceiling, walls and sides. It is truly amazing to see how much water is held there and also amazing to see the rubber edge push it all away. The water then quickly runs down the drain, rather than slowly evaporating into the air. The surfaces dry almost instantly and don't even have watermarks left on them. This second benefit almost completely removes the need for chemical cleaners. It was a two-fer! I had found two environmental solutions in one swipe.

Clean walls and no chemicals making me cough; this was a good deal. In fact, it is so good and so inexpensive, I am going to buy some extras and give them out at housing inspections. Why not give a gift along with knowledge? It is no fun to only be an enforcer, when I can also be a helper.

Moisture will be here forever but mildew does not have to be.

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