

## The Apartment Owner's Hidden Money Drain by Jeff Butler

As in any business, apartment management must watch its bottom line to ensure profitability. Normally, it does so quite efficiently.

When it comes to plumbing, though, that bottom line can become confused. For example, is it more economically prudent to copper repipe a building that has an aging galvanized plumbing system now, or wait until it becomes a serious problem?

It's actually deceptive. In a given building in a given month, for example, you might only spend \$500 to fix a few leaky pipes. Not much, and when compared to the cost of copper repiping the whole building, it's *really* not much.

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But let's broaden the picture a bit. How long have you been plugging leaks? And, going forward into the future, how long will you continue? Over time, simply patching leaks can run into thousands, even tens of thousands of dollars, depending on the building. Perhaps this could be viewed as "the cost of doing business", until you realize that, those thousands or tens of thousands are being spent for *no permanent solution*. By the time the plumbing deteriorates to the point you have to replace it or else, you've spent far more than it would have cost to copper repipe the building.

There are other "hidden costs" associated with old galvanized pipe as well, such as wear on plumbing fixtures causing the increased need for repairs and even replacement. There are also additional complaints from tenants, usually due to low water pressure and discolored water.

All this is only going to get worse. The leaks and associated problems are going to increase in frequency and number until it gets to the point you *have* to repipe. At that point, it could very well happen because of an unplanned-for emergency.

Interestingly, property owners, through no fault of their own, are often unaware of such problems. They're not receiving the tenant complaints. They may not even be aware of the plumbing bills for the leaks. They just know maintenance costs are being kept below a certain level, the building is functioning, it's got tenants and life is good. They can be unaware of the slow but serious financial drain caused by the old plumbing system. And this is a drain -- it's a "nickel-and-dime" series of patch-ups that don't solve the overall problem. It's also a drain on your property value; if you were to sell a building in such condition today your buyer would automatically deduct the cost of repiping the building.

Now let's look at the reverse. What happens if you copper repipe the building now?

First, the "emergencies" will end. You will have no more leaks that require paying a plumber for every visit. The endless financial drain will cease. You also eliminate a future "emergency" when the plumbing system literally falls apart and you have to repipe to put it back together.

Associated problems will also cease: increased maintenance of fixtures, and complaints of low water pressure or discolored water. And as to that ever-important bottom line, it just improved markedly. In addition to all the money saved from future repairs, your property value has increased.

As you can see, the cost of repiping is actually considerably less than continuing indefinitely to repair leaks, both in money *and* time.

### Choosing the Right Repiping Company

When you decide to copper repipe, choosing the right company is important, as is the case when choosing any vendor for servicing your building. Not all repipe companies are equal.

- Choose an expert in the field, a specialist in repiping. As with anything, if this is their only trade, you'll get higher expertise and better pricing than someone who *also* does copper repiping.

- Make sure they understand *your* situation. They should fully inspect the plumbing system in your building and make recommendations which will fully handle your specific problems for the price quoted.
- They should work to make both the problems and the solutions fully understood by you. It's your money you're spending, and you deserve to know exactly how it's being spent.
- Make sure they use top-grade materials. There are different grades of copper, and lower grades don't last as long. L-grade is the best, so make sure the company you choose uses it. Also make sure the fixtures they're going to install are the best as well.
- Due to copper's long life span, the company should provide a lifetime guarantee.
- Make sure the company you choose takes care to keep work areas as clean as possible, and fully cleans up daily. They should also include patching walls as part of their service.

As with any contractor or repair or maintenance vendor, make sure the repipe company you choose has plenty of references and that you contact a number of them and get their experiences.

Pricing is important, but you may have discovered that automatically going with the lowest-priced vendor is not always the wisest choice. Of course you should make sure the price is reasonable and competitive, but make sure the above points are part of the package as well.

If your building has a galvanized plumbing system, copper repiping now as opposed to later is the sound economic decision. And it's less expensive than you might think. Contact a repipe specialist today -- most offer free estimates -- and find out how you can permanently end the hidden money drain.

*Jeff Butler is the owner of Repipe Specialists, Inc., one of California's leading repipe companies with over 14 years of experience. For a free estimate, call 1-800-737-4746 or visit Repipe Specialists' web site at [www.1800re piping.com](http://www.1800re piping.com).*