

Rental Watch

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Dear AOA:

My units all have dishwashers. I am starting to get complaints from the residents that the dishwashers do not clean the dishes as well as they did when new. What is the problem and what can I do about it?

Bill

[For the answers to this question and the ones that follow, we turned to licensed contractors and maintenance specialists Jerry L'Ecuire and Frank Alvarez. AOA]

Dear Bill:

This problem may be caused by a number of issues.

1. Check that the dishwasher's filter or grates are not clogged. The filters are commonly found under the rotating spray arms at the bottom of the dishwasher. The filters normally snap in and out of place. Remove them gently and watch for broken glass.
2. Check the operation of the water inlet solenoid valve. It should open and close crisply.
3. Related to the inlet valve is the water level sensor. The sensor looks like a small upside down cup or float, normally located at the front corner of the tub. Calcium buildup can sometimes cause the water level sensor float to malfunction, causing too little water to be allowed into the dishwasher. Cleaning the float area with vinegar should help.
4. Check the temperature of the water going into the dishwasher. The water should be at least 140 degrees.
5. Hard water is most likely the biggest hindrance to having clean looking dishes. The dishes may actually be clean, but look dingy or milky. Hard water will cause calcium and mineral deposits to adhere to all wet areas of the dishwasher and over time the dishes themselves. The rotating spray arms may fill with mineral buildup and clog. To remove the hard water deposits, run the dishwasher empty on its longest setting, usually the pots & pans setting. Add a few cups of vinegar to the water without soap or dishes. Run the dishwasher with clear water through a short cycle to flush the vinegar before using again.
6. Installation of a soft water system will greatly improve the performance of any dishwasher, as will using name brand dishwashing soap.

Dear AOA:

The "white fuzzies" are emerging from the exterior walls of my stucco two-story apartment building. These "mold-like" appearing substances look like loosely organized wafts of cotton. All spots affected are less than chest high and have been exposed to moisture from recent rains and/or are close to sprinklers. The under lying stucco becomes blistered and powdery under the paint. Over the last 12 years I've scratched, patched and re-stuccoed these same areas four times. What can be done about it and how do you stop it from coming back?

Gene

Dear Gene:

The effect is called efflorescence and it is a natural occurring condition on wall or floor material, such as concrete, brick and stucco. These porous materials absorb water and when the water evaporates, it leaves behind an alkaline salt. The efflorescence appears as a white, crystalline powder. Water is always the culprit. First thing to check would be sprinkler locations and if the spray hits the wall, relocate the sprinkler. Another problem is moisture wicking up into the stucco from the ground. Older buildings built before 1974 probably do not have a "Weep Screed" at the bottom of the wall. A weep screed is a metal flashing designed to act as a vapor barrier and transition between the concrete slab or stem wall & wood framing. Installing a weep screed after the fact is not feasible. A solution would be to locate the transition between the slab

or stem wall and the wood framing. Saw cut through the stucco to the base plate. Now fill the saw cut with a bead of silicone sealant. The silicone will act as a vapor barrier, effectively stopping the moisture from wicking up into the stucco. Refinish your stucco and paint to suit.

Dear AOA:

I am getting pinholes in some of my 90-degree joints on my hot water copper piping. Why is this happening and do you have any solutions?

Mr. W

Dear Mr. W:

We have often found this problem can be traced to high water pressure and/or an overly enthusiastic recirculation pump. Check the water pressure entering the hot water tank, if it is over 60 pounds per square inch; consider installing a pressure regulator to lower the pressure. If your system has a recirculation pump, check the volume of water being pushed through the pipe system. Many pumps come with adjustable settings that can be lowered, thereby reducing the amount of water friction caused by large volumes of water rushing through the pipes. If your pump does not have an adjustable setting, all is not lost. Connect your pump to a time clock to enable it to operate only at times when the circulation pump is needed most. As an example, have the pump operate between the hours of 6am to 10am and than again between 5pm and 11pm. The rest of the time the pump is off, reducing the amount of water friction deteriorating your pipes.

Jerry L'Ecuyre is the owner of JLE Property Management & Buffalo Maintenance, and is a licensed contractor and real estate broker. Jerry has been involved with apartments as a professional since 1988. He can be reached at (714) 778-0480, or by email at jerry@jle1.com. Frank Alvarez is the Operations Director for buffalo Maintenance. He has been involved with apartment maintenance for over 14 years. Frank can be reached at (714) 956-8371. Please view the website at www.jle1.com