

Rental Watch

Dear AOA:

I have trouble keeping the moisture levels down in the bathrooms of my apartment units. All the bathrooms have exhaust fans. I have even rewired the fan and lights into one switch to ensure the fan is used every time the light is turned on. Do you have any other solutions? R.N.

For answers to this question and the ones that follow, we turned to licensed contractor and maintenance specialist Jerry L'Ecuyre.

Dear R.N.:

The problem lies in the fact that the resident will use the shower, cause a moisture build-up and then leave the bathroom turning off the light/fan combo switch. The moisture is still present, but the fan is off and mold now has a chance to grow. We have recently discovered a solution to the fan/light dilemma. It is called a Fan/Light Time Delay switch. What this switch does is incorporate a time delay for the fan when the light switch is turned off. The time delay can be set from five minutes to sixty minutes. This will allow adequate time to exhaust the moisture without the resident turning off the fan prematurely. The time delay switch is hidden behind the switch plate, which should keep resident tampering to a minimum.

Now where do you find such a versatile fan/light switch? The only place we were able to find it was at Energy Federation Incorporated, (800) 876-0660 (push #1 for wholesale) or in any internet search engine type in: "EFI Fan/Light Time Delay switch". Cost is about \$39 or less depending on the amount purchased. Compared to the cost of a Mold Attorney the price of the switch is cheap!

Dear AOA:

I have just replaced the rubber seals in a bathroom faucet, but the faucet still leaks. I like the two handle faucet and don't really want to replace it with a new one. Why is it still leaking? D.V.

Dear D.V.:

We will assume you are working on a standard faucet with brass valves. Chances are the "Valve Seats" are worn, cracked or chipped. When you replace rubber seals in a brass faucet, always replace the valve seats. They are located in the body of the faucet below the valves. When you go to the home improvement store, ask for a "Faucet Seat Removal Tool" it cost less than \$5 dollars and is "L" shaped. Insert the tool into the faucet body, unscrew, and remove the seat. Match your existing seat with a new one and reinstall. If the seat can't be removed, resurface it with a seat-dressing tool (The seat-dressing tool is a small hand valve seat grinder). This should solve your leaking problem.

Dear AOA:

I have owned a 6-unit apartment building for approximately 30 years. I've always been careful to maintain its original construction and preserve the original design. Lately, I have found that in my goal to achieve higher rents and better quality residents, my building is competing more and more with newer, up to date and better looking properties. Feeling a bit architecturally challenged, what can I do to compete in this new market? I don't want to spend a fortune, but some changes must be made. M.R.

Dear M.R.:

A tri-color paint scheme can go a long way to update your building and keep the cost down. Another major factor may be 30 year old landscaping. Sometimes you just need to start over from scratch. Rip everything out and start fresh. Both of these ideas will help, but only to a point. You still have a late 50's to 60's-era building. To truly transform your apartment building and compete with the newer, fresher properties of today, try using what is called "Architectural Foam". This foam is used to give your building more dimension or detail. Architectural foam can be used around windows, doors, and garages, even on the corners of the building. With simple inexpensive foam shapes, you can transform your 50's or 60's era box building into a modern, more desirable property. Think of it as plastic surgery for your building. This project can be a Do

It Your Self project if you are familiar with construction and stucco applications and methods. Essentially, the foam shapes are glued or attached to the building and stucco is then applied over the shapes. The building is then painted to suit using the new architectural shapes as accents. A local manufacture we use is: VEFO Incorporated (909) 598-3856. They can supply a catalog of shapes and additional information.

Do you know a Right Hand Door from a Left Hand Door? *If a door opens toward you and the knob is to the right, the door is right-handed. If a door opens toward you and the knob is on the left, the door is left-handed.*

Remember that every property and situation is different so when making building and/or equipment changes, make sure you know your local code compliance laws, uniform building codes and NFPA safety standards. Always consult with a licensed contractor, building inspector and/or related professional if you have a particular problem. If you are in need of a licensed, insured contractor or inspector, you might want to call Contractors Referral service toll free at 1-866-769-7523.

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.