

Appliance Repair Show Transcript—March 9, 2008

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Kenmore Refrigerator Icemaker Replaced Three Times and Stops Making Ice after Two Months

JOHN MCCULLOCH

And we'll start things off with Steve, in Shelby Township, on the Appliance Repair Show. Good morning, Steve, go ahead please.

STEVE

My question is, on the [icemaker](#), this is the third one I've put in, and it keeps going bad after two months.

JOHN SOWDEN

You keep putting in a new icemaker in your [refrigerator](#)?

STEVE

Yes and the ACM keep going bad.

JOHN SOWDEN

And this is an all one piece [icemaker](#), non-serviceable?

STEVE

Its one piece but you can put a module in there, the ACM in there.

JOHN SOWDEN

Okay. And you said it lasts two months?

STEVE

It lasted two months and then it went dead again. I put another one in and it did the same thing.

JOHN SOWDEN

When you say it goes bad, are you...?

STEVE

[It stops making ice.](#)

JOHN SOWDEN

It stops making ice?

STEVE

Yes.

JOHN SOWDEN

And are you sure the problem is within the [icemaker](#)? Every once in a while you get a bad part out of the box, but to have two break so quickly, you either have really bad luck or there might be something else causing the problem.

STEVE

I'm not sure.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah. Without knowing exactly what kind of machine you have...Kenmore is a brand, but the appliances are made for them by all of the other major manufacturers, so by having a [Kenmore refrigerator](#) means you could have a [Whirlpool](#), a [GE](#), a [Frigidaire](#), and other brands even though it's still a [Kenmore](#). Most replacement parts, depending on the manufacturer, have at least a ninety day warranty. You say the last one broke in two months, did you have it replaced--?

STEVE

Yeah, this one I had replaced and then in like ten weeks it went bad again. It's like the third unit I've put in there.

JOHN SOWDEN

That's really unusual. Have you had a service person come out and evaluate it?

STEVE

They came out before that and said the [icemaker's dead](#) and that was it; I replaced it.

JOHN SOWDEN

Okay. Boy, I tell you, it's really an unusual problem you have, that it would keep going out like that. Like I said, normally there would be something else that would be causing the machine to not make ice. Such as, you could have a loose connection to the [icemaker](#), and then you plug a new one in and it works for a while. A loose wire in the cabinet,

which isn't a very common problem but it does happen. As far as not making ice, you could have an intermittent [water valve](#), where it fills sometimes and sometimes it doesn't. After three or four icemakers, I would think that the problem may lie elsewhere and by replacing the [icemaker](#), you're just jiggling something to make a connection and get it to work for a while again.

STEVE

Okay. Thank you.

JOHN MCCULLOCH

Could he troubleshoot that at [RepairClinic.com](#) by plugging in the serial number? The serial number would indicate who actually made it, wouldn't it?

JOHN SOWDEN

The [model number](#) would generate a list of the replacement parts, and from there you could determine who the major manufacturer is. Again, without knowing, it's hard to get super specific about things. The reality of it is, for a replacement part to fail three or four times in such a short period of time, while not impossible, most of the time there's generally something else wrong there.

Sears Portable Humidifier Has Trouble Starting Up Again After Shutoff

JOHN MCCULLOCH

Let's go to Bob, in Adrian, who's got a question on a [humidifier](#), here on the Appliance Repair Show. Go ahead please, Bob.

BOB

I have a [Sears portable humidifier](#) that's in the bedroom. When it shuts off, when the humidity gets to the right point, it won't always start up. I have to put it on the high setting and go in there and help the [fan](#) by giving it a kick start, if you will.

JOHN SOWDEN

Give it a spin?

BOB

Give it a spin, right.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, that's generally because the bearings in the fan are worn. As it runs for a period of time it gets hot, and if the fan stops in one position, it's hard for it to get started again. Most of the [fan motors](#) they use for those are referred to as [shaded pole motors](#), and they're made for light applications. So, there's not a starting package or anything for them. You may have a fan that is serviceable by oiling the bearings. Most often you'll see two small holes at the top of the motor for you to take it out and a place to put a few drops of oil on each front and back of the motor that would then drip into the bearing. A

lot of times there will be a piece of felt wrapped around to hold the oil in that area. If it's not that type, if it's a [sleeve drying fan](#), all you can do is put a new fan in there.

BOB

If I can just check with Sears then they can sell me the replacement?

JOHN SOWDEN

That's correct. Given cost of parts versus a new one (I don't know how much these cost, but normally [portable humidifiers](#) are one hundred dollars or less) and with the age of it, you might want to look at another solution.

BOB

Alright, thank you.

1998 Whirlpool Refrigerator/Freezer Has Water Leaking Into the Bottom of the Freezer

JOHN MCCULLOCH

And we'll go now to John, in LaGrange, Indiana, with a question here on the Appliance Repair Show. Go ahead please, John.

JOHN

I talked to you probably three weeks ago about a [top freezer refrigerator](#), a [Whirlpool](#), about ten years old. And when it defrosts, [it filled up with ice in the bottom of the freezer](#) part itself, and the water backed up into the refrigerator. And we've checked the [drain tube](#) and it seems to be clear. And at that time, you thought that Whirlpool had made a recall on those models and put an additional part in the freezer to direct that water so it will go down the drain better.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, a lot of times what happens is the drain assembly is close to the [air diffuser](#), and if you have a leak of cold air in that diffuser area, it will then migrate into the drain and cause it to freeze. Sometimes the repair consists of just using some thermal masking tape to seal up that area.

JOHN

Okay. My question is you seem to think that [Whirlpool](#) had a part or something, and I've called them and they don't seem to know what it is. I've looked at your schematic, and I would think that since it's an additional part that maybe it's not on there. Is there any way I can find out exactly what that part is?

JOHN SOWDEN

Yes, there is what they call a [drain strap kit](#), and all that is more or less is a piece of aluminum or copper that you loop around the [defrost heater](#), and then put that down inside the drain to help transfer heat, if the additional part is not available. If you go to our website, [RepairClinic.com](#), and go to the "[Contact Us](#)" section, or just type in

“[Refrigerator Help](#)” you can enter in your email address and ask a specific question. Let them know you’re looking for something for your particular model to help with this problem. Depending on how many requests we have, we can get back to you in a day or two and research that a little more for you.

JOHN

Okay. I appreciate your help, sir.

1960’s Sears Dryer Will Not Start and Makes a Buzzing Sound When the Start Button is Pushed

JOHN MCCULLOCH

Here with a question on a [dryer](#) that’s buzzing, Rose in Plymouth, on the Appliance Repair Show.

ROSE

Yes, my dryer is old. It’s a [Sears](#) and it’s a copper color, but I don’t have a [model number](#).

JOHN SOWDEN

Whoa! If its copper colored, that clues me in as to what vintage it is!

ROSE

Right, it’s from about the late sixties, I think. [It will not start](#). When you go to put the clothes in and push the [button](#), all it does is buzz. We have to rotate the drum back and forth several times, or slam the door hard to make it go. So I’m wondering, it has worked fine up until this point, and I wondered rather than replacing it if we could solve this problem and maybe fix it.

JOHN SOWDEN

So if you try to start it and hold the [door switch](#) in and kind of give it a help, it will get moving?

ROSE

Well, rotating the drum manually is what really helps it get started, but sometimes it doesn’t work and we have to do it several times, and I’m too old for this.

JOHN SOWDEN

Once it gets going, does it keep going through all the cycles?

ROSE

Yes.

JOHN SOWDEN

From what you described, it sounds like there’s a dead spot in the [motor](#), which after this period of time is not unusual. The bearings in the motor are worn, and if it stops in a

certain position it just doesn't have the oomph to get it going again. Normally, a replacement of the [motor assembly](#) would cure this.

ROSE

It would probably be worth more than the [dryer](#) is worth, correct?

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, the [dryer](#), like you said, is probably thirty plus years old. The [motor](#), if you were to install it yourself, would be about one hundred dollars for the part. I'd recommend, if you do that, you replace some of the other wearing parts in there, such as the [belt](#), the [idler pulley](#) and the [rollers](#), which would be another thirty or forty dollars worth of parts. And if the rest of it is in okay shape, then the difference between your [dryer](#) now and a new one made by [Whirlpool](#), which is probably the manufacturer of your current one, a lot of the parts are pretty much the same. The designs are the same. They are two different [motors](#), but I guess what I'm saying is the design and everything is not varied too much from the one you have now. Which is a good thing because if you've gotten thirty plus years out of the one you have now, that's not bad? So yeah, as far as do you want to put one hundred to one hundred fifty dollars in it, if you do the work yourself... unless you want to keep it to match the copper tone [washer](#) next to it.

ROSE

No, we have a white washer.

JOHN SOWDEN

Sometimes people do that, they want to keep the set as it is. So for aesthetic reasons they'll repair it. But as far as being worth it, I'd say you're probably better off to find a new partner for the [washer](#).

ROSE

Okay, great. Thank you so much.

Kenmore Dishwasher With Mineral Buildup Problem

JOHN MCCULLOCH

Here with a question on a [Kenmore dishwasher](#), Charlie in Highland, on the Appliance Repair Show.

CHARLIE

I'm calling regarding a stainless steel inside [Kenmore dishwasher](#). We live in an area that has a bacterial iron. We have [filters](#) in the basement that takes out most of it, but not enough to keep it from building up on the walls and probably inside the mechanical parts also. I'm wondering if there's something that can be run through the [dishwasher](#) that will help clean it out.

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, the most common product is called [Glisten](#) (part # 5303319027), and it's like four or five bucks a packet. You dump it in there and let it cycle and it will take a lot of the soap scum and sediment and things of that nature out of the tank and the [wash arms](#). For the hard water scale, you might want to try a little vinegar and see if that helps. There are times where you might have to go with something a little more aggressive to get at those hard water stains. So, I would start with something like [Glisten](#) (part # 5303319027) that is made to clean out dishwashers. I actually saw where Jet Dry has a new product out for cleaning out dishwashers. I have not personally used it, so I don't know how well it works, but I'm assuming it works pretty well since they're rinse agent works pretty well. I'd try the commercially available stuff, and then if that doesn't work I'd go to dumping some vinegar in the main wash cycle, obviously without dishes in there, and let that run for a while.

CHARLIE

Okay. And [Glisten](#) (part # 5303319027) is G-L-I-S-S-O-N?

JOHN

It's G-L-I-S-T-E-N, and you should be able to find that in the [accessories section](#) of our website, www.RepairClinic.com. And most parts suppliers carry stuff like that.

CHARLIE

Okay, fine. Thank you very much.

2003 GE Advantium Microwave Smoking and Giving Off an Electrical Smell

JOHN MCCULLOCH

Here with a question on a [GE oven](#) that's smoking and smells funny. Let's go there with Stacey on a cell phone. Good morning, Stacy, how can we help you?

STACY

I spend a lot of time in my RV. My RV is right now in Arizona with my lovely wife. I flew back here to be here for the car show for this weekend. And of course the moment that I leave, she calls and says there's a funny smell in the kitchen. And I say, well, you're probably cooking and she says, no, there's something else going on. And I say well, see if you can find what it is and let me know. So last night she calls me and says that the Advantium oven we have, which is the three-way speed cooker, [microwave](#), convection oven, is smoking. And I said, well, unplug it until I get home on Monday, but I'm questioning because it's a five year old oven. I can remove it from the wall and take it to [GE](#) but is it really worth spending whatever it takes to look at a five year old oven like that? Should I just buy a new one?

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, the Advantium is a [microwave](#)/broiler unit combination, if I'm not mistaken. So as far as the smoking goes, it could be a lot of things. It could be just the [element](#) has burned out, or it could be a transformer, even a [circuit board](#) that's overheated and you're getting the electrical smell.

STACY

Yes, that's the smell that she's describing.

JOHN SOWDEN

That can be an expensive smell, meaning that if you need a new transformer or [circuit board](#), the parts alone would be a hundred bucks or so. That's not a cheap unit, if I'm not mistaken.

STACY

Yeah, it would cost us eight or nine hundred dollars to replace it. If I buy a new one, that's not a problem—but at five years old, has the technology changed enough to justify junking it and buying a new one?

JOHN SOWDEN

Not really. If you can do the work as far as taking it out and taking it somewhere to have someone look at it that saves the cost of a service call. Most places have a nominal bench fee to diagnose the unit, from twenty to forty dollars, and after that it's the part. I'd say it's worth at least knowing what's wrong with it. If it costs you thirty or forty bucks and the time it takes to get it off the wall and have someone go through it, it would probably be worth investing that much too at least get a known answer to the problem. But at eight or nine hundred bucks for a new one, even if it were two or three hundred dollars for the repair, it still probably would be worth it. If it was fifteen years old and technology had lapped it that many times, then I would say no. But that's an expensive unit and has all kinds of bells and whistles and does all kinds of wonderful things.

STACY

She loves it. Well, we'll do that then.

JOHN SOWDEN

I take it she wasn't listening when you made the comment about her cooking.

JOHN MCCULLOCH

We hope she's not on the web right now listening. Which she could be!

STACY

I hope not, too! Thank you so much!

Kenmore Dryer Broken Door Latch and Question about Pedestals

JOHN MCCULLOCH

And, here with a problem with a [Kenmore dryer](#), Karen, in Troy, on the Appliance Repair Show. Good morning Karen, go ahead please.

KAREN

Yes. We have a [Kenmore dryer](#) and the [latch](#) broke on the door. So we prop it shut to get the dryer to work. Is there some way we can fix this latch?

JOHN SOWDEN

Yes, that's actually one of the more common easy do-it-yourselfer type repairs. The [latch assembly](#) I think is only four or five bucks. You can pop the old one out with a [screwdriver](#) (part # 8830). At times, if it gets hard, you just have to remove the [front panel](#) and the [actuator](#) on the door itself just snaps into place. Is the female end of it, the receptacle, what's broken?

KAREN

Yes.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, that's the most common. That's a real inexpensive, not too hard of a repair to do. If you go to our website, that's [RepairClinic.com](#), and type in "[Dryer Help](#)", it will take you to the dryer tips page. Then if you log in and give us your email address, create an account with us, you can then go to our self-help section and we actually have a document that you can print out that will tell you how to step-by step remove the [front panel](#) on that unit to get in there if you need to. A lot of times you can just reach in there with a pair of pliers or a putty knife and kind of work the old one out and snap the new one in.

KAREN

Really?

JOHN SOWDEN

Yes.

KAREN

I have one quick question about a new [dryer](#). They always have these big doors or drawers that they sell with them.

JOHN SOWDEN

You mean the pedestals?

KAREN

Yes.

JOHN SOWDEN

Okay.

KAREN

Do you recommend those, as far as ease of loading?

JOHN SOWDEN

That's what they're about, is ease of loading and extra storage space. The reason why, from what I can figure out, that they have come out with those is that most [front loaders](#) are harder for people to get into to reach the clothes. It puts it up above waist level so you're not bending over so much to get inside the [dryer](#). That's one complaint from people that either have a bad back or they're in their twilight years; that it's just a lot more work to reach in and bend over and pull out the wet heavy clothes. Whether it's worth it or not depends on how you feel about it. Most of it's designed for [front loading washing machines](#) though, and then of course the [dryer](#) next to it. They put on one just so everything's the same height. So as far as if you were going to get a new set and go with front loaders, most people these days are getting the pedestals.

KAREN

Okay. The front loading washer, is there less walking around? The [washing machine](#) will walk and move sometimes. Is there less of that that goes on with the front loaders?

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, not less of it. And actually using a pedestal, depending on your floor, can help create more issues because your center of gravity is higher, and the pedestal you have to make sure is really level and again, first floor laundry and stuff like that these days, with people putting their machines upstairs instead of the basement, does create some walking issues. But I wouldn't say that they're more or less prone to it. It's their installation more than anything and they also spin a lot faster these days than they used to. The [front loaders](#) now speed up to well over a thousand RPMs, so they really get moving, and any little variation will kind of vibrate through the floor and cause it to walk a little bit.

2004 Whirlpool Imperial Gas Oven Having Problems Unscrewing Light Bulb Cover

JOHN MCCULLOCH

Here's a question on a Whirlpool oven from Barbara, in Ecorse, on the Appliance Repair Show. Go ahead please, Barbara.

BARBARA

I have a [Whirlpool Imperial](#), 2004 is when we purchased it. The serial number is IT1419511. The [light bulb](#) went out. We used to be able to just unscrew it and put another one in. Not with this one. My boys can't figure out how to get the bulb out to replace it.

JOHN SOWDEN

Okay. This is a [freestanding oven](#), you said?

BARBARA

I don't know what you mean, sir.

JOHN SOWDEN

This is a stove or a [wall oven](#)?

BARBARA

Oh, no, it's a regular [gas stove](#).

JOHN SOWDEN

It's a gas stove?

BARBARA

Yeah. And there's a little rim around the thing where the [light bulb](#) screws in, but there's no way you can put a tool in there.

JOHN SOWDEN

It has a [glass cover](#) on it?

BARBARA

Yes sir!

JOHN SOWDEN

And so you normally have to unscrew the glass cover unless there's a metal bracket holding it in place.

BARBARA

No, there is a metal bracket around it, but the directions say to unscrew it. But good luck if you can do it!

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, unfortunately, with all the heat in the [oven](#) those things can get baked in place after a period of time.

BARBARA

I've only had it since '04!

JOHN SOWDEN

I'm trying to get a handle on what style of receptacle you have, and most of them, the newer ones have got a nice little jewel looking [glass cover](#) that you unscrew, and then from there you have to unscrew the [light bulb](#). Which then again can get frozen in place and at times you have to remove the socket and try to get the light bulb out that way. I've seen and heard where you can use a potato, turn the power off and break the light bulb, reach in there and grab it. But I most often have to get in there with a pair of needle-nose [pliers](#) (part # D203-5) and break out the socket.

BARBARA

If we could get the cover off then we'd be all set. It's just the [glass cover](#)!

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, normally those things just unscrew. Do you have a jar or lid mitt or those little rubber pads? You might want to get in there to put on the glass so you get a good grip on it. Normally they unscrew counter clockwise; it's a quarter turn and you pull it out. But

once it's in there and you get the oven temperature up and self clean and all that good stuff...the other thing is it's hard to get at it because you're reaching through the cavity of the [oven](#) so you don't have free movement. What I'd recommend is to go to our website, [RepairClinic.com](#), enter the [model number](#) as it reads off the machine, and then you can see a picture of the [oven light](#) receptacle, and that will give you an idea of what you're looking at.

BARBARA

You can't even get it out from the back!

JOHN SOWDEN

You can pull it out and get at the socket assembly. Most of them snap into place these days. And push it out through the front side and get it out and work on it that way. But then you're going to probably hold onto it with one hand while you twist it with the other, so it's not going to give you a whole lot more leverage. Or, the other thing you can do, if it's that bad, is a lot of times you can just order a new socket assembly and pop it in. A lot of them are between fifteen and thirty dollars for the newer style ones, so I guess if you break the existing one getting it out you're not behind much if you just replace it.

BARBARA

When the [light](#) burned out I just thought, oh, I'll just take it out and screw another one in. That's what I did with my old [Hardwick](#) that I had for forty years!

JOHN SOWDEN

That's a name I haven't heard in a long time!

BARBARA

Oh, that thing was the best oven you ever saw!

JOHN SOWDEN

I would say at this point you just have to get in there and really wrench on it, and if you break the glass you'll just have to order a new socket assembly.

BARBARA

Okay, question: since I'm a senior and I depend on my kids to do it when they have the time, would a service call to have someone come and do it be expensive?

JOHN SOWDEN

I don't believe so. If you explain what needs to be done—and it depends on who you call—but if you just tell them that you need your [light bulb](#) changed, they can tell you what they charge. Most are not going to go beyond the cost of a light bulb and the service call, because it should be a pretty straight forward thing, and you're going to get a guy who's used to wrenching on things all day long. So he could probably get that off pretty quick. But yeah, you could just tell people, here's what I want done and find out the price. Some just charge a flat rate, by the hour, but I would say roughly you should be able to have somebody come out and do this for you for between forty and sixty dollars.

BARBARA

Okay. Fine! Thank you very much. I do appreciate the help.

2008 GE Freezer/Refrigerator Making Loud Sounds When It Runs

JOHN MCCULLOCH

And here is a [GE refrigerator](#) question from Fred, in Plymouth, on the Appliance Repair Show.

FRED

GE refrigerator, [freezer on top](#), just delivered a month or so ago. My only requirement is that the refrigerator be quiet. Compressor is quiet. Refrigerator comes on, ten or fifteen seconds later there's a vibrating, raspy sound, something like that. Lasts a second or two goes off, does it four or five more times! A repair man tells me, live with it, it's normal; it's the refrigerant moving through the system.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah. That's something about a lot of the newer machines: they run more, and they also, in order to get some efficiency, use a smaller [tubing](#) for the condenser or the high side of the system. By pushing the refrigerant through a smaller tube it moves faster and they get higher efficiency out of it. Unfortunately the by-product of that, at times, is noise. You get that rushing sound, some sound like a trumpet at times until the pressure gets stabilized and the machine gets running up to speed. There are, depending on the unit, things you can do as far as how the tubing is put into the drier, the glass component it goes through before it goes to the evaporator. If it's not inserting in there properly, at times you can bend the end of that down and get the noise to not be as bad. In the past there's been kits available, years ago, where you wrap some of the tubing in a deadening tape and things of that nature. But you said you did have the [GE](#) people out?

FRED

Right, and just kind of looked at me like I was crazy and said, c'mon that's the refrigerant moving through the system!

JOHN SOWDEN

Right.

FRED

I have called the store where I bought it. I talked to the manager and they're not aware of it. It's really an irritant! If I'm sitting twenty feet away from the [refrigerator](#), I hear it!

JOHN SOWDEN

It's kind of the nature of the beast on a lot of the newer appliances to get the energy efficiency. And as a service person, it's one of the hardest things to deal with, the "my old one didn't do this or my old didn't do that, my new one does" situation. But if it's something that is definitely ongoing and this one sounds like it might be [a lot noisier](#) than

the norm, I would go back to the manufacturer and say, “I’ve had somebody come out and they’ve told me that this is normal, but is there anything you can do? I’m not really happy.” And they might be able to send somebody out and do something to it as far as adjustment of the tubing, or even where it’s installed. If it’s in a cabinet section that acts as an echo for the noise, there are things that can cause it to be worse. If nothing else—and I certainly can’t speak for anybody—they may give you another one.

JOHN MCCULLOCH

But the chances are that what Fred’s facing is going to be true in just about any newer [refrigerator](#) he gets? No matter how much money he pays for it, it’s going to have this efficient system that one of the byproducts is a little bit of noise?

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, most of the newer machines are a little bit noisier than the older ones for the reasons I described, as well as most of them will run more but they draw less electricity while they’re running. That’s the other complaint that I hear from people is, “I bought this new machine, the sticker says I’m going to save all this money in energy, but it runs half the time!” And what they do is, rather than stopping and starting more often, and it’s on startup that it draws the lion’s share of electricity, as the machine starts to get colder they actually, on a lot of the newer machines, slow down the speed of the compressor. They just coast along there, draw a lot less current, and overall averaged out it’s easier to do that and it keeps more accurate temperatures and less temperature swing. Overall, you are saving energy.

JOHN MCCULLOCH

So, I guess if you wanted someone to thank for it, Fred, you’d thank the people who want us to drive electronic roller skates instead of Cadillacs.