

Appliance Repair Show Transcript—April 6, 2008

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2006 GE Side by Side 23 Foot Refrigerator Making Humming Noise and Ice Maker and Water Dispenser Not Working

JOHN MCCULLOCH

And, we'll start things out with Lee in Madison Heights with a question on a [GE refrigerator](#) here on the Appliance Repair Show. Lee, go ahead please.

LEE

OK, it is a GE 23 footer, side by side, two years old, bought in June of '06. I don't know when it started doing it. The refrigerator just has a slight hum that sounds similar to a computer printer running. I have power to it: the line voltage is 110 to 114. The lights come on inside, but the lights on the water dispenser side just sort of blink. The ice maker does not run, the water does not dispense and naturally everything inside of it is getting hot.

JOHN SOWDEN

OK, so [it's not cooling](#) then?

LEE

No, it is not running at all.

JOHN SOWDEN

And all you hear is a hum?

LEE

It's a slight humming. It's very similar to a printer running, if you know what I mean on that.

JOHN SOWDEN

And this something where you hear this noise for a short period of time, or is it constant?

LEE

No, it does not run. What it sounds like to me is a solenoid trying to kick on and humming until it kicks off.

JOHN SOWDEN

So you hear this hum for a short period of time and then it cycles off, and then a short time later tries again?

LEE

Correct.

JOHN SOWDEN

That's the [compressor](#) trying to start. What you hear is, the compressor is being supplied the line voltage by the control board, or at least it sounds like it is. And then the compressor is not starting and the overload on the compressor, which is like a circuit breaker, is then turning off power to the compressor to keep from burning up the windings. Then it's trying again.

LEE

OK. Would that also kill all the power to the controls for the ice maker and water dispenser and stuff like that?

JOHN SOWDEN

No. Normally if it's in the compressor area it's going to be something with the compressor. Now this unit has a main [circuit board](#) in it, and it controls a lot of different things. It's possible that the board has failed. Or, it's possible that the compressor itself has failed, and the high current draw from the thing trying to cycle on and off has damaged other portions of the board and that's why you're having other issues there. I would look and see what the warranty is on that for your sealed system or for your compressor and other things. It sounds to me like you for sure have an issue with the compressor trying to start, which could be something as inexpensive as replacing the relay start package or the components that start the compressor. Either that, or the [compressor](#) itself has failed, which is why I ask you to look at the warranty because that can be a very expensive repair. As far as the other things go, they could be related in the sense that this is all controlled through one big main control board. It draws a lot of current when it tries to start the compressor, so it could have caused other portions of the board to heat up and conk out. My long winded point is that I'd call for service.

LEE

I have tried unplugging it for a half hour, hoping that the pressure in the compressor side of it would equalize itself, but that did not help.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, and the other thing that can cause the compressor to overheat is if the [condenser fan](#) is not running. That's the small fan motor that is normally on the underside of the unit that helps cool the condenser area. If that has failed then the compressor will run very hot. If you put your hand on the compressor, it's probably going to be very hot—in fact, it might burn you, so be very careful. And that's from just trying to start. When it is trying to start, you can see if that fan motor is running, as well. It normally will run at least while the compressor is on, and at times it will run all the time, depending on the unit and how it's wired. So there are other components that can cause the [compressor](#) to short cycle and overheat.

LEE

It's really a disappointment, because the one I replaced it with is still running up north in the cabin.

JOHN SOWDEN

That's always the case. It's probably drawing a lot more current than the one you have is, when it's working properly. But that's the thing: people replace them and they get a lot more energy efficiency, but if you've got the old one and it's still working, you think, "Why did I do this?"

LEE

Correct. OK. Thanks very much.

2006 Kenmore Side by Side Refrigerator Vinyl Façade Rusting Under the Ice and Water Dispenser on Freezer Door

JOHN MCCULLOCH

Here's another [refrigerator](#) question from Jim in South Lyon on the Appliance Repair Show. Go ahead Jim.

JIM

I think this is an easy question for you. Your screener said you might have answered it before, so I apologize for calling in.

JOHN SOWDEN

That's fine. We always want your questions and concerns here on the Appliance Repair Show.

JIM

Good. And I can always go to [repairclinic.com](#), which I didn't know about before. So that's good.

JOHN SOWDEN

That is good.

JIM

The wife is complaining, and I can see why. I have a relatively new [Kenmore refrigerator](#). It's not a stainless steel, but the front of it has a vinyl coating or something like that. And right underneath the water and ice dispenser it's starting to get rusty. And I wonder if there's a way to touch it up or repair it other than to put a magnet on top of it?

JOHN SOWDEN

That's an idea. Have the kids draw more at school and hang it up on the fridge. Now, this is a side by side?

JIM

[Side by side](#) and it's right underneath the ice cube dispenser...

JOHN SOWDEN

OK, so this is a freezer door rust issue?

JIM

Right.

JOHN SOWDEN

So is this a stainless front or a stainless look?

JIM

No, it's not, it's like a tan color, light tan or bone color?

JOHN SOWDEN

OK, so it's an almond or biscuit color. If it's rusting in that area that could be because in the drip tray where you catch all the spillage, some of the [water is leaking](#) underneath that and sitting up against the metal frame. Normally that will evaporate before you get into any issues. The other thing that could cause this is possibly a void in the insulation around that area, where the hot moist air, or the external temperature air is hitting that cold surface and it's sweating; you're getting condensation along that area, even along the inside of it. On some units there is a small heater that they actually put along that area that looks like a piece of aluminum foil with some wires taped to it. It adds a small amount of heat to that area to keep it from sweating. But basically it's from air infiltration or spillage that will cause it to rust around that area. Now how old is this refrigerator?

JIM

It's only two years old. The other thing I was going to mention is that the [tray](#) you're referring to is black in color; I don't know if it's because we have hard water, although we have a water softener.

JOHN SOWDEN

And it's white now?

JIM

Yeah, I've tried everything to clean that and there's nothing that I can come up with that will work. I've tried vinegar and every household cleaner you can think of and the stains just stay on that thing.

JOHN SOWDEN

So you've got the white hardness residue that's just stuck on to the plastic there. All you can really do on that one is just replace it; that's the easiest way if you can't get it clean. Some of those aren't cheap: some of those plastic molded parts for that are fifteen or twenty dollars for that little snap in tray. What I would do is, since this is a [Kenmore](#) I'd talk to Sears and say, I've got this problem, is there anything you can do? Really, the only thing I can think of aside from sanding that area and applying some [touch-up paint](#), is to at least get it cosmetically back to looking okay and then spraying new paint. It depends on how big the area is...

JIM

It's small, but it looks like it's getting worse.

JOHN SOWDEN

Right. The other option is to replace the [door](#) itself. The doors are all one big foamed in place assembly and it's three or four hundred bucks for a new door. And again, as I said, in most cases if you put the model number as it reads off the machine into our website, it will have a picture of all the common components for that and I'd just look and see if there is what they call either a trough heater or a dispenser heater. They don't fail very often, but if that has failed then you're just getting a lot of condensation buildup and it's just rusting through the front.

JIM

So it's not from [dripping from the front](#)? It's something from behind?

JOHN SOWDEN

It could be. Again, if you have a lot of spillage then it's going to hold a lot of water underneath that tray, and if it sits there long enough it will start to rust on there.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, it could be that an ice cube is melting overnight in there. If you have the [damper door](#) sticking open, or kids are great for that where they'll spill stuff; even in the office sometimes people get carried away with the one in the break room.

JIM

Could I get a paint that would match it, if I called Sears, do you think?

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, that refrigerator is either made by Whirlpool, GE or Frigidaire; it just has the Kenmore name on it. Normally the [touch-up paints](#) are pretty good for matching up. At times you can buy a spray can or a can you can actually mix and use a sprayer, like you'd paint a car, that's more or less the exact paint coat for that. But that gets pretty expensive

too. Normally the touch-up paint will look better than what you have, but of course you have to sand it down to the metal first and get all that rust out of there, or it will just bubble through again. If it doesn't come out too well then you can put the kids pictures over it. Or, if you have ever ordered parts from repairclinic.com, we do send everybody a nice refrigerator magnet.

JIM

All right. Not a big deal. Thanks a lot.

1990 Speed Queen Washing Machine Leaving Oil Spots On Clothes

JOHN MCCULLOCH

Here with a question on a [Speed Queen washer](#), Jerry in Clinton Township, here on the Appliance Repair Show.

JERRY

Two weeks ago I was doing laundry, my whites, and they all came out with brown spots on them. And I couldn't figure out what it was. Well, I called my son in law, and he's mechanically inclined. He took the agitator off, and there's what looks like a gear down there that the [agitator](#) sits on, and there was oil all over that. Well, we cleaned it up and he was looking at it and asked me how old it is. Well, it's eighteen years old. And he thinks it's coming from the [transmission](#).

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, he is absolutely correct.

JERRY

And he told me that he went online and he says to get the parts would be too expensive. He suggested that I buy a new washer.

JOHN SOWDEN

More than likely what's happened is, where the shaft comes up through the housing on the transmission there's a series of seals, and those have been compromised. So you're getting a little bit of oil that leaks up through the shaft as it agitates and it's getting into the underside of the agitator and of course from there out into your clothes. Cleaning it up only gives you a few more loads of clean clothes and then it's going to continue to do it.

JERRY

I did a load yesterday, just to try it out, and all my whites are polka dotted now.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, it's not going to go away. The best thing is to replace that [transmission](#) as an assembly. Most transmissions are between one hundred and fifty and two hundred dollars, but also while you're doing that, you need to replace the tub seal. Once you

compromise that seal, it's better to replace it and you'll have to tear the machine completely apart to do it.

JERRY

That's what he told me, it's the seal that went.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, there's a seal in the transmission but there's also a water seal that you need to replace. So I'd estimate that you're going to have at least a few hundred dollars in parts, and that's if you decide to spend a few dollars and get in there and tear it all apart.

JERRY

Yeah, he went online and got the whole diagram with all the parts, and he told me that it would be beneficial for me—with the machine being so old, eighteen years old, and it's given me good service until the last month or so—to go buy a new [washing machine](#).

JOHN SOWDEN

That's probably good advice. You can repair that, but the good news about that is if the appliance is going to conk out, it's better that it does it all at once rather than nickel and dime you as time goes on.

JERRY

He cleaned it out and everything and put it together, and I did a load yesterday and I'm sorry I did it.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yes, I'd recommend looking at buying a new one. And if the dryer's the same age, even if it's still working well, you might be able to get a good deal by buying a pair.

JERRY

Get rid of the [dryer](#) also?

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, if it's working fine, great. I'm just saying that if you're buying a new washer, you might get a better deal on a pair right now. So it's the time to look at those options.

JERRY

OK.

Frigidaire Bottom Mount Refrigerator/Freezer Freezing Everything in Refrigerator Section

JOHN MCCULLOCH

We go now for another [refrigerator](#) question from Laura in Sylvania, Ohio on the Appliance Repair Show. Go ahead please, Laura.

LAURA

I have a [Frigidaire refrigerator/freezer](#) and the fridge is on top. I don't know where the booklet is to get the model number. But to tell you how old this is, there are coils on the back, so it's somewhere between eleven and thirteen years old.

JOHN SOWDEN

OK.

LAURA

It's [freezing everything in the refrigerator](#) itself.

JOHN SOWDEN

Is it freezing in certain areas of the refrigerator, or is it just in certain spots?

LAURA

No, it's freezing everything.

JOHN SOWDEN

Is it on the top shelf where it's normally a problem?

LAURA

I've never had any problems with this [refrigerator](#) up until now, and same with the freezer. I have it set on energy saver; I turned it down to the least cold setting, and the freezer is set on the least cold setting, and it's still freezing everything. This has been going on for three days. I did call an appliance repair man, but he hasn't returned my call yet. My question is, is this something that can be repaired, or would I be better off, because of the age of the refrigerator, to buy a new one?

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, there are several things to consider. First, the energy saver setting you're describing: when you set it to the energy saver mode, all that does is turn off a set of heaters around the door frame of the appliance.

LAURA

Things are even freezing on the door!

JOHN SOWDEN

Right. Now, if it's freezing everything, I'm assuming that [it's running all the time](#)?

LAURA

Yes sir.

JOHN SOWDEN

So it's telling me that more than likely the [thermostat](#) could be stuck in the closed position, or that it's not sensing the temperature. The other thing is that on some of these units there's a little [air duct](#) that mounts to the ceiling of the refrigerator. And it's made to

distribute air across the sensing bulb of that thermostat. If that has fallen off or is not set properly in place, you're not pushing the cold air from the freezer across the sensing bulb of the thermostat, and so therefore it's going to run forever, too. So I would open up the refrigerator door and look at the ceiling where the air comes out from the freezer section to see if there isn't some missing ductwork or if it's knocked away or something.

LAURA

No, everything's there.

JOHN SOWDEN

OK.

LAURA

Not to my knowledge, anyway.

JOHN SOWDEN

It depends on how many people are using the [refrigerator](#)...

LAURA

Just one.

JOHN SOWDEN

OK, because I've seen it where the kids have knocked it off and left it laying on the bottom, and if you don't know it's there, then of course you don't know it's missing.

LAURA

Right.

JOHN SOWDEN

From what you describe, I would lean more towards the possibility that the [thermostat](#) is sticking. I would set the controls back to the middle. If it's A through F or one through nine, or whatever it is, set the controls back to the middle point. Because a lot of times by adjusting one way or the other you're actually starving the control for the cold air to be sensing. So I always tell people, start in the middle and then go from there.

LAURA

OK.

JOHN SOWDEN

If it still has an issue then I would lean more towards the possibility is thermostat itself is sticking.

LAURA

So it would certainly be worth a service call, then?

JOHN SOWDEN

Sure. It would certainly be worth a service call and a repair. The coils on the back don't really have anything to do with the age of the machine per se. It's called a static condenser versus a forced air condenser. A forced air condenser is mounted underneath the appliance, and makes it so you can slide it up more against the wall for counter-depth installation. And the static ones are normally a little more inexpensive because they're easier to build, and because they have this big radiator on the back so there's no need for a fan to cool it. The actual room air migrating across it actually does a pretty good job of condensing the refrigerant. So, my point is, just because you have that style doesn't necessarily mean it's very old. They still make those.

LAURA

OK. This is a wonderful service that you provide.

2008 Whirlpool Bottom Mount Refrigerator Ice Maker Making Bad Tasting Ice

JOHN MCCULLOCH

Here's Bob in Eastpointe with another [refrigerator](#) question on the Appliance Repair Show. Go ahead please, Bob.

BOB

Hi. This seems to be the morning about refrigerators. Mine's kind of basic, I've got a brand new [Whirlpool](#). It's been in service for a couple weeks now, and we've noticed that the [ice cubes taste funny](#), like a medicine type taste. Our kitchen's very small, so I cut my wall out so I gained another four inches when I go back and then I have a vent on the stairwell of the basement, so I get a lot of circulation. But I have room back there for a filter. Now what kind of a [filter](#), a charcoal filter do they have just for iceboxes?

JOHN SOWDEN

Well, first of all, does your machine have a filter in it? Is this ice and water in the door or is it just an [ice maker](#)?

BOB

No, I didn't want ice and water in the door. This is a French door, because we have a lot of room. The [freezer is on the bottom](#), and you open it up and the ice maker's down there in a bin.

JOHN SOWDEN

OK. And it does not have a factory-installed water filter? Normally that would be on the [grill](#). You'll see a little round, two inch disc on top of the filter.

BOB

No.

JOHN SOWDEN

So your unit does not have a factory filter, and you're entertaining the idea of installing one?

BOB

I had one about the size of a spray can on my motor home, and I used to change that every year.

JOHN SOWDEN

Right.

BOB

But that kind of filter would work?

JOHN SOWDEN

Sure. There are a few things to try. The first one is, whenever you start up a new [icemaker](#); throw away the first few batches of ice.

BOB

Oh, yeah, we've done that.

JOHN SOWDEN

Because you're getting all the stuff, it's a plastic liner and then the icemaker mold itself and that stuff will get into—

BOB

Well, it's been running for a couple weeks.

JOHN SOWDEN

Right. But I would just empty the ice bucket a couple of times. Just fill it up and then empty it, and that will help to some degree. But as far as the water coming in, there's a whole host of filters that you can install for that. Most of them are pretty inexpensive. You can get one that just mounts into the quarter inch line that goes into the refrigerator itself for around twenty dollars on our website, [repairclinic.com](#). Click on [water filters](#) for refrigerators and we have some there that you can install. But one thing you want to make sure of when you install those is that they are charcoal filters, as you asked, and they come with instructions.

BOB

Yeah, you have to flush them out.

JOHN SOWDEN

Exactly. People that don't read the instructions hook them up and they don't run the water filter into a bucket and let three or four gallons run through it, so then the next call you receive is about how they have all these [black flakes in their ice cubes](#) because the charcoal is in there. The filters are normally directional, meaning the water goes through them one way, and they do need to be flushed prior to putting them into operation.

BOB

OK.

JOHN SOWDEN

But this is something you can try and it should help quite a bit. A lot of it depends on the incoming water, whether it's well or city water...

BOB

It's city water.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah. They clean up the water pretty good to start with.

1998 Maytag Performa Taking Too Long to Dry

JOHN MCCULLOCH

And now we will hear about something we haven't heard today: a [dryer](#), from John in Detroit on the Appliance Repair Show.

JOHN

I've got a [Maytag Performa](#); I've had it for ten years, and I have to run the cycle twice to get my clothes to dry.

JOHN SOWDEN

OK.

JOHN

I've replaced the thermal couples and I went ahead and had a Maytag repairman out, but it still has the same problem.

JOHN SOWDEN

You said you changed thermal couples?

JOHN

Yeah, I believe it's called a thermal couple. Is it the heat sensor on the heater pipe, where the flames flow through into the drum?

JOHN SOWDEN

There's a light sensor and a [high limit thermostat](#) in that area. The first question that I always ask with a dryer that [takes too long to dry](#) is what does the venting look like? Have you inspected it and/or cleaned it?

JOHN

Yeah, I have. I've made sure that it's a short run, just over four feet with one bend in it.

JOHN SOWDEN

OK. That will put you in good shape. And it's clear all the way outside, the external hood is not plugged up and not letting the air escape?

JOHN

It clogs up once in a while but I always clean it out.

JOHN SOWDEN

Do you have any heat at all coming from the dryer?

JOHN

Yes I do, but it just barely warms up.

JOHN SOWDEN

Is it something that's continually warm throughout the cycle, or does it eventually get cold?

JOHN

It eventually gets cold.

JOHN SOWDEN

OK.

JOHN

Well, there are a few things that can cause this situation, but this is the most common one. On the [gas valve](#) itself there are two things that look like two small seed batteries cut in half. They're [solenoids](#), and what they do is when current is applied to them they open up the gates inside the gas valve to let the gas through. And what happens is, normally they will fire fine the first cycle and sometimes the second cycle, but as current is applied to them and they get old and weak, they drop out. So what happens is you turn the dryer on, it will fire up and cycle fine the first time, or for the first five or ten minutes you'll have some heat, and then possibly the second time it will fire up. But after that, if you look at it when it's running, you'll see the [igniter](#) glow bright red as it should, and then you'll hear a click which is the light sensor saying the igniter's glowing bright red so lets send some current to the solenoid coils, and then you'll see nothing. And then it will cycle over and over again that way. If it's doing that, that's saying that the coils have failed. They're failing under load, which means they'll work a few times, and then they'll heat up. All they are is a very thin wrap of fine wire, and as current is applied to them, especially as they get older, they'll have a small break and the break in the wire will expand and you'll have an open circuit. As it cools down sometimes the circuit will be completed, and that's where you get the intermittency. So I would lean more toward the possibility that the gas valve solenoid coils are what's causing this.

JOHN

That sounds good.

JOHN SOWDEN

They're not too expensive and not too hard to replace. We have the instructions on our website as to how to access your unit.

JOHN

I probably won't have much trouble. I'm a machine repairman.

JOHN SOWDEN

Oh! Well, then you're halfway there!

JOHN

Yeah, I just couldn't diagnose the problem.

JOHN SOWDEN

If it fires for a while and then it looks like it's trying and not working, then most often it's those coils. Normally there's just a few screws that hold down a hood that keeps them in place, and then two wire harnesses, a two wire and a three wire, that plug into them so you can't mix them up. It's a fairly common problem.

JOHN

Great. I appreciate your help.

1990 Maytag Dryer Model LDG312 Clothes Getting Stuck in Front of Drum

JOHN SOWDEN

Let's try Russell in Temperance. We have to be quick, Russell.

RUSSELL

OK. I've got a [Maytag dryer](#) here that's about 18 years old. The model number is [LDG312](#). And it's eating my clothes.

JOHN SOWDEN

It's eating your clothes?

RUSSELL

It's eating my clothes. In the front of the drum the [clothes are getting stuck in the front of the drum](#).

JOHN SOWDEN

Yes, there's actually a set of two [felt pads with plastic runners](#) on top of that that the drum rides on. What happens is after a period of time the nylon or plastic runners will wear down and cause the drum to drag. You probably have a metal-to-metal condition there. It's not too hard to access. After you unplug the unit, you can take the two screws off the bottom of the front panel and take the front panel off, and you'll get a real good look at the glides.

RUSSELL

I've had the front panel off already, so I could put a new ignition switch in. But all my stuff is getting stuck on top of the drum.

JOHN SOWDEN

Right, and that's from the drum sagging because those pads have been worn down. If you take that off you're also looking at a big gray bulkhead in front of it, once you remove the front panel. There are four more screws that retain that to the front panel; once you take that off you can lift up about a half an inch and pull that straight forward and remove that whole bulkhead.

RUSSELL

I didn't know if it was that. What about the [wheels](#) in the back of it?

JOHN SOWDEN

It's possible that those have failed too. Normally, you'll hear a lot of [thumping and bumping](#) if that's the case. You might want to replace those too, if it's eighteen years old, while you have it apart. If it's [pinching the clothes](#), most often it's because they're being pushed against the front there and those [glides](#) are worn out.

RUSSELL

It's pinching my underwear and my underwear's getting holes in them.

JOHN SOWDEN

Yeah, well I would remove that front and see if the problem is pretty evident once you get that off. You'll probably see a lot of shavings and black residue from where those are worn out. To replace those and the [rear rollers](#) all together is probably fewer than fifty dollars and you'll have all the wearing parts replaced.