Appliance Repair Show Transcript—August 31, 2008

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Topics Discussed:

2002 Kenmore Side By Side Refrigerator Losing Temperature in Both Sections after Ice Maker was Hooked Up

JOHN SOWDEN
We're going to go to Don, in Ottawa Lake, who's got a question on his Kenmore side by side refrigerator. Go ahead, Don.

JOHN MCCULLOCH
Good morning, Don.

DON
Good morning, gentlemen. I want to try to give you a lot of information fast, so you can answer my question. I've had this side by side Kenmore for probably six years, and it's been working flawlessly. I've never hooked up the ice maker because I have well water and it just wouldn't work. So last week I hooked it up, pulled the refrigerator away from the wall, hooked up the water line to it, put it back against the wall, and then boom! My freezer isn't freezing and my refrigerator isn't getting as cool as it used to be. I don't know if this is totally coincidental, if I bumped something or if the thing just decided to go out at this particular moment, but I doubt if hooking up the water line had anything to do with it. What are your thoughts?

JOHN SOWDEN
It is not making ice, then?

DON
It's not making ice. It's not even freezing anything! All of my ice cream has melted. I had to put my milk in the freezer to keep it as cold as the refrigerator. I have a thermometer (part # 19950055) in there that I bought that shows it to be forty degrees in the freezer.

JOHN SOWDEN
Okay. I doubt that your hooking up a water line has anything to do with the unit failing, although moving it in and out could have caused a problem. Sometimes if you have something that's dropped underneath the refrigerator, when you pull it out and push it back in, you can block the fan motor that cools the compressor. So I would start there.

DON
Fan motor is running.

JOHN SOWDEN
Okay, because those little styrofoam popcorn things from packaging can get sucked in there and when you move the unit around it can stop the fan.

DON
I also checked the vents inside of the refrigerator, which is what the owner's manual said to do, and they're clear.

JOHN SOWDEN
Okay.

DON
I just don't have the temperature anymore inside.

JOHN SOWDEN
And it's both sections?

DON
Yes.

JOHN SOWDEN
All right. The only thing I can think of is that on some units, there's a circuit board, a main control board, in the back and it's possible that something was unplugged or whatever when you moved it out. Most of those, all you have to do is hook up the water line and all the electrical stuff is already done. You don't have to hook up the water line or anything like that. So I'd say it's probably coincidental. Normally if it's not cooling at all, you're looking at a situation where you either have a refrigeration system problem, where the compressor's not pumping as it should or you have a leak in the system, or more commonly you have a defrost system failure, which means the coils in the back wall of the freezer are iced over, frosted over, and you're not pushing any air through both sections. So, I would start with an inspection of the evaporator coil. Also make sure that the freezer fan motor is running as well.

DON
Okay.

JOHN SOWDEN
And on some of those, depending on who made it, the freezer fan will actually change speed as the call for cooling increases or decreases. So if you hear it barely turning, that might be normal, and if you leave the door open for a while, it will then pick up the fan speed to move more air.

DON
All right.

JOHN SOWDEN
Normally, you can see a frost buildup on the back wall of the freezer section if you have a defrost problem but not always, it depends on how bad it is.

DON
So does the back of the freezer come off to check this?

JOHN SOWDEN
Yes. Each unit is different. You're probably going to end up removing all the shelves; there's normally some side rails that the shelves rest on or the basket slides on and you'll have to remove those, and then there are a series of screws that retain the back panel to the wall. If you have glass shelves in the freezer, a lot of times people think this is a great time to clean them, which it is, but don't take them out of a cold freezer and put it into a sink full of hot water, because you might end up ordering some new shelves from RepairClinic.com! I don't think you caused anything by moving it out, but you certainly have an issue, and I would start by investigating a defrost system failure.

DON
Thank you.

Maytag Dishwasher Making Noise and Not Filling with Water

JOHN MCCULLOCH
And here's Jacob, in Redford, with a Maytag dishwasher problem on the Appliance Repair Show. Hi Jacob, go ahead please.

JACOB
Hi, good morning! Yeah, just to tell you a little bit about my problem: It was making noise for I'd say a week and a half or so and I got under there and I was looking at it, and I thought it was either the motor or the little pump in the back that pumps the water out. Then I used your website and the troubleshooting area, and there's also another website, but I used your troubleshooting area as well, and then water stopped coming out of my dishwasher! There was no water entering it and this other website pointed to the water inlet valve, and then I went to Repairclinic.com over there off Michigan Avenue and the guy I talked to there said he thought it was either the water inlet valve or it could be the float in the front. So I replaced both those with brand new parts, and still no water is coming into my dishwasher; I believe it's still making that noise, but I'm not running it

because I think the heating element is getting too hot and I don't want it to melt the plastic without any water being in there. You know what I mean?

JOHN SOWDEN
Right. You say first it was noisy, and then you have a condition where there's no water coming in?

JACOB
That's right.

JOHN SOWDEN
Basically what causes the water to come in is the water inlet valve has to open, and there's electricity sent to it through the float switch. And then the source of that is either the control board or the timer.

JACOB
Right, right.

JOHN SOWDEN
If that is not sending the signal, it's going to stop the unit from filling.

JACOB
Okay.

JOHN SOWDEN
The other thing you need to inspect, it's not as common of a problem but you could actually have a broken wire in the wiring harness of the door, especially where the door hinges at the bottom where the wiring harness comes through, where the door panel meets it. I'd inspect that.

JACOB
The bottom of the door?

JOHN SOWDEN
From the timer assembly, the wires are normally fed down to the machine and then they go to the underside where one goes to the float switch and two to the water valve. It sounds like you're not getting, obviously if you replaced the water valve and the float switch, I doubt that fresh out of the box you'd have a bad component, so I'd say that your problem lies elsewhere. It depends on what model you have, but…do you have a circuit board or do you have a timer on it?

JACOB
That was the next thing I needed to look at. I haven't gotten to that as of yet.

JOHN SOWDEN

Okay. Whatever is supplying the current to the components has failed, or the wiring from the control to those components has failed. Obviously, every machine is different. The unit will fill three to six times per cycle, depending on what cycle you selected. The short wash is a smaller amount, so the unit fills and drains several times through that cycle. As far as the noise goes, if you have two pumps in the unit, which again depends on model, some will have a pump that circulates the water for the wash and then have a separate unit for the drain. You need to figure out which one the noise is coming from. More than likely you have something caught in there, debris of some variety. Have you broken any glasses or anything like that recently?

JACOB
No, I haven't. The only one I see, unless the pump is somehow attached to the motor, the only other pump I see is the one in the back that causes the water to drain out of the dishwasher, and I took that one apart and there was no debris in there. I was wondering if it threw a bearing or something.

JOHN SOWDEN
It's possible that the motor bearing has failed. Was there any sign of water leaks?

JACOB
It seems like it was a little moist, but it was on the left-hand side kind of toward the front where that water inlet valve was. It wasn't back there where the pump was.

JOHN SOWDEN
The problem with water leakage is that where it ends up and where it starts can be in two different places. Sometimes it will drip all across the underside of the tank and drip off a corner somewhere and it's actually leaking from the pump, or even the inlet where the water comes into the side of the dishwasher. If it's leaking, that's normally a sign that the bearings are bad, if you see a leak in the pump assembly. If not, if the unit's noisy and you've disassembled the pump and there's nothing in there, then I'd say that you have a bad bearing in the motor as well. First you have to get some water in there to test it. If you remove the front panel and/or the control panel, you'll see the wiring diagram, and it will tell you what components are in each circuit, but they also have a timing chart that will tell you how many minutes into the cycle the unit will fill.

JACOB
Oh, okay!

JOHN SOWDEN
They're not that confusing and once you look at it for a second you'll figure it out, but it normally goes in minute increments and it will show you as it goes through the cycle what is turning on and off inside the machine.

JACOB

That will help me because the noise doesn't happen right away. It usually happens towards the end of what I would consider the first cycle. So that timing diagram, I should look at that and see what would be firing during that time?

JOHN SOWDEN
Exactly.

JACOB
All right. So first thing, I have to replace that timer?

JOHN SOWDEN
Before I would start replacing parts, I would make sure that that's in fact the problem. You can check and see if you're getting current to the water valve that you know is letting water into the machine and then you can also check the wires with an ohmmeter (part # DM10T) to make sure that they're not broken, that you don't have an open circuit. The good news is that you've got a long weekend to do it!

JACOB
Isn't that true! What a way to spend the weekend, huh?

How to Shop for a New Electric Range and Hood

JOHN MCCULLOCH
Let's talk with Greg, in Lansing, about a new stove, here on the Appliance Repair Show. Hi Greg, go ahead please.

GREG
Hi. I'm not calling about a repair question. I am in the market for a new range and a new range hood. I'm a single guy and I'm looking for an electric range with the coil top burners.

JOHN SOWDEN
You want one that cooks the meals for you?

GREG
Yeah, I want the digital controls, cook timer, self-cleaning and all of that. I've been to the big box stores and basically I've looked at Kenmore, Frigidaire, GE, Hotpoint and Whirlpool and I've been online trying to find a site, or learn more about what might be the relative quality ratings. I don't need something real grandiose, real fancy, but I would like to know that what I'm buying is of reasonably good quality.

JOHN SOWDEN
Well there's Consumer Reports, which is a good start.

GREG
I've seen that. You do have to pay for that, don't you?

JOHN SOWDEN
Their online stuff, I don't know if they have archived articles or not. Obviously on the web you can normally find a lot of stuff if you just type in "reliability of" whatever. The Kenmores can be one of the other three brands that you mentioned, so they're made by another manufacturer for the Kenmore brand. So you could buy the same almost or exactly the same model Kenmore that could be a Whirlpool, Frigidaire or GE.

GREG
Do you have any opinion that you can express over the air?

JOHN SOWDEN
Well, I normally rely on Consumer Reports because they test them a lot more than I would and frankly a lot more than you're going to use it, if it's just you, unless you cook a lot of meals.

GREG
That's the issue I'm mulling over. I don't cook all that much.

JOHN SOWDEN
Right. It really depends on what you want as far as a budget goes. It also depends on if you want to put something really nice in your home for resale value; obviously there are certain brands and certain levels of those brands that help on the resale kitchen, if you've got something a little more high end. If you don't care and you just want the basic stove, basic controls is probably going to suit you just fine, and as far as longevity, it's not going to get a lot of wear and tear. Pretty much anything you buy is not going to be taxed too much.

GREG
Okay. I've been online and I've looked up, "electric range quality reviews" and you get hundreds of websites. I retired recently and started back at the local community college taking computer classes, and the one thing I've learned about websites is you can't find one that's totally objective. Various manufacturers and various retailers will actually go on some of these websites and tell you how great their stuff is.

JOHN SOWDEN
That's true.

GREG
So it's really hard to depend on that.

JOHN SOWDEN
Right. Again, Consumer Reports is at least unbiased.

GREG

Yes, I've seen that several times. I guess I should go back and click on that. I'm actually on your website right now.

JOHN SOWDEN
Okay. Well, our screwdrivers are on sale this week!

GREG
Are you familiar with your website, or do you have somebody who deals with that? I've got a question that I don't need to bother you with…

JOHN SOWDEN
Familiar in what way? I don't write the code, if that's what you mean.

GREG
A friend of mine said you have a link, it's called, "Weekend Handyman". I can find "Weekend Experts"—

JOHN MCCULLOCH
That's at the WJR—I'm going to put you on hold. Howard Bouten, our producer, is going to tell you how to access that, all right?

GREG
All right.

JOHN SOWDEN
And otherwise, good luck on the stove!

Maytag Washing Machine is Vibrating and Walking

JOHN MCCULLOCH
And we'll start this segment off with Dick, from Petersburg, with a question on a Maytag washer on the Appliance Repair Show. Go ahead please, Dick.

DICK
I have a Maytag washer and it is vibrating all over the place. It pushes up against the dryer and my wife said it started doing it a while back. It's always moved a little bit, but now it's jumping all over the place!

JOHN SOWDEN
Okay.

DICK
The manual says level it; I leveled it and then it says pick it up four inches from the back and set it down. It seems like the back legs aren't solid or something. I don't know.

JOHN SOWDEN

Some have a self leveling device; it's possible those are stuck. Sometimes you can just tap on them with a hammer (part # 818-16) and break the back legs free. When you level it, you certainly want to try to use a level (part # 930-9) and try to get the unit as level as you possibly can.

DICK
Yes, it was level, yeah.

JOHN SOWDEN
But it's not as important to have it basically perfectly level as it is to have it secure to the floor and to have the legs screwed up inside the cabinet as much as you possibly can lowers the center of gravity of the whole machine.

DICK
I see.

JOHN SOWDEN
So if you've got the legs sticking down two or three inches, I would run them inside until the cabinet is almost sitting on the floor, and because all floors are different, especially in the basement you get a lot of variation, it's important to make sure that the unit doesn't rock at all. If it's not perfectly level, that's okay, as long as it sits very solid on the floor.

DICK
You can't move it, it's solid, but then as soon as it starts cycling, it starts vibrating and moving all around!

JOHN SOWDEN
Right. After that, what you might have is the tub itself sits on a lower substructure and then between that and the base of the unit, there's normally what they call a damper or a snubber pad, which is basically a plastic ring that the unit sits on. It's possible that's worn out, and it's also possible that the springs are stretched out a little bit. So if you get in there and it's still walking quite a bit, I would recommend replacing that lower snubber assembly. Also when you have it apart, you want to clean up that area on the main base. There's kind of a lip there and you want to clean that off to get rid of any oil or debris so a lot of people think you should lubricate that, but you do not, you just want to clean and dry. On some models, they actually want you to put a little corn starch on there to help as far as the vibration. But there are actually two productions: In one they recommend it and on one they don't, so it really depends on your particular one. So I'd start with that lower snubber and you can easily, with your particular model, remove the front panel and put it in spin and you can see how badly it's shaking around in there. Normally, there are a few screws at the bottom of the front panel that you can remove to get an idea of how bad it's shaking, but if it's level to the floor, then the problem is inside the drive mechanism and normally it's going to be the snubber pad between the main base and the tub itself.

DICK

You say the back ones you can tap them with a hammer (part # 818-16)?

JOHN SOWDEN
It depends on the unit. Some of them are threaded, and others are self-leveling. Normally if you lift it up and you drop it, once they hit they floor they lock into place.

DICK
That's what the manual says and I do that a couple times and it seems like its solid, but then when it starts to cycle it just starts vibrating.

JOHN SOWDEN
Again, if one is stuck, and a lot of times it will rust and all that good stuff, you might have to break them free with a hammer so that they do ride up inside the track independently but once it hits the floor it should lock into place. If it's still walking afterwards, I'd look at the internal portion of it.

DICK
All right. Thank you very much.

2005 Frigidaire Top Mount Refrigerator Glass Shelves Sweating; Lots of Water

JOHN MCCULLOCH
Richard, in Maumee, has a Frigidaire refrigerator he'd like to know about, here on the Appliance Repair Show. Good morning, Richard.

RICHARD
Good morning. This refrigerator is approximately three years old and the top shelf, which is glass, sweats something terrible! Everything I lift up, like milk cartons or plastic bottles, there's a slew of water underneath them! I cleaned it yesterday and this morning it's the same way, it's loaded with water.

JOHN SOWDEN
Is this a freezer on top?

RICHARD
Yes sir.

JOHN SOWDEN
Okay. Well I would suspect what you have is, you've probably got a drain leak somewhere in the machine, when it goes into defrost and the water is dripping onto that shelf and it's collecting it.

RICHARD
Where would it becoming from? The top?

JOHN SOWDEN

Yes. It's coming from the refrigerator ceiling; normally there's a trough that when the unit goes into defrost the water drips down into this trough and through a series of tubing and it's supposed to go to the underside of the machine. If that's restricted, frozen up, or even misaligned, then you'll get a bit of water every time it defrosts. It will bypass the proper drainage system and drip into the refrigerator through the ceiling.

RICHARD
Could I reach that from underneath inside the refrigerator?

JOHN SOWDEN
If you have to get at the drain, normally you have to remove the back wall of the freezer. Depending on the model, sometimes you have to remove the freezer floor to get at it, but what I would do is, dry off the shelf and then dry off the refrigerator ceiling, then eight or twelve hours later inspect it and see where any moisture is accumulating.

DICK
Okay.

JOHN SOWDEN
That will give you a starting point of where the problem lies, but because if you're getting a lot of water there—

RICHARD
It's quite a bit!

JOHN SOWDEN
Yeah, a lot of the new shelves are made to hold a little bit of water because it's a "spill-safe shelf"; I think is what they call them.

RICHARD
Okay, well thank you so much, gentlemen!

1998 GE Over the Range Microwave, Model JVM1350, Has Electrical Burning Smell and Doesn't Heat

JOHN MCCULLOCH
And here's Louis, in South Lyon, with a question on a microwave on the Appliance Repair Show. Go ahead please, Louis.

LOUIS
I want you to know we appreciate your show. We listen to it every Sunday morning. I have two questions on two different items. I'll start with the GE Spacemaker. It's an XL series, model number JVM1350. It's about ten years old and it's been working fine all this time until yesterday morning, I was heating a cup of tea and I noticed there was a change in the sound of the motor and I stopped it and I opened the door and there was an electrical burning type of smell and so I shut it off and tested it. The lights (part # WB3

X10003) work, the clock works, and the turntable (part # WB39X78) still turns, but I'm wondering what the problem could be?

JOHN SOWDEN
So, the timer counts down but it doesn't heat?

LOUIS
Yeah, the timer works but it doesn't heat.

JOHN SOWDEN
Most often, you've lost something in the high voltage section of the microwave. It could be anything from a door switch, which sends, there are several components that the electricity has to travel through in order to get it to heat. There are several things I would start with. The first and most common is, on the control board itself, there's normally a four-pin connector that the main wiring harness comes in and plugs to. I do believe either the orange or red wire is where the main power supply comes in. If you look at the back side of that board you might see where that's burnt. If that's the case you'll want to replace the control board.

LOUIS
Do you have any idea of approximate cost?

JOHN SOWDEN
You're probably looking at around one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty dollars for that board, again depending on the unit. If all that's fine, then you've lost something in the high voltage, which would be a mag tube, a transformer, a capacitor and/or a diode. The diode is probably the most inexpensive part. Given that you're working on the unit and high voltage is where most of the problem is likely to show up, I would recommend having somebody come out and diagnose the unit rather than try it yourself because microwaves do store electricity even when they're unplugged. The capacitor stores a charge, so if you get in there and touch the wrong thing, you can get a free hairdo or worse.

LOUIS
Okay, then. I'll start with the door and from there I might have to make a call.

JOHN SOWDEN
And/or there's places that do have a bench fee, so if you feel like wrestling it off the wall you can save some money by taking it in and a lot of places will charge twenty to thirty bucks to diagnose the machine for you. At least then you're not making a major investment into the unit and you can use the rest of that money towards a new one if need be.

LOUIS
Yes, like I said, it's ten years old. Do you have any idea what the average length of time is on this type of unit?

JOHN SOWDEN
If you get a lot of use out of it, I'd say you're probably at the point where a lot of people would replace them. They certainly have come down in price. The one thing to remember, especially…this is an over-the-counter JVM right?

LOUIS
Over the stove.

JOHN SOWDEN
Over the stove, right. One thing you have to build into the price of a new one is installation if you're not going to do it yourself.

LOUIS
I see.

JOHN SOWDEN
That adds another seventy dollars or so to the price, which is the same as a service call. The other thing is cosmetics, does it match your stove, all that good stuff.

2003 Jenn Air Side by Side Refrigerator Ice Maker Not Working and Ice Buildup Underneath

LOUIS
Okay. My other question is my son has a Jenn Air side by side refrigerator, it's about five years old, and the ice maker has stopped working. I looked at it briefly the other day and there's water under the ice maker. It's frozen to the walls under the ice maker so it's cold, but I really didn't get a chance to get into it. What could it possibly be?

JOHN SOWDEN
All right. Actually what you can do is go to our website, RepairClinic.com, and if you give us your email address you can go into our library and we have a nice document called "Ice maker not working properly" and you can print it out and take it over there and walk through all the steps on how to make sure it's filling properly and all that. It sounds to me like it's not filling properly or something is caught in there. The water is overfilling the ice maker and freezing at the bottom.

LOUIS
Could it be the trough at the back that might be plugged?

JOHN SOWDEN
Normally, it's the fill tube that would be plugged causing that condition, or the ice maker is overfilling.

LOUIS
Okay. I'll do that.

2005 GE Refrigerator Evaporator Fan Constantly Changing Speed

JOHN MCCULLOCH
Mike, in Clinton Township, has a question here on the Appliance Repair Show. Go ahead please, Mike.

MIKE
Good morning. I have a GE High Efficiency refrigerator. Ever since I got it, brand new, it sounds like the evaporator fan is searching for a proper speed. I think it's a two-speed.

JOHN SOWDEN
Yes. Some are two and some are three speeds, or variables.

MIKE
This thing, even in the middle of the night on the opposite end of the house where we sleep, we can hear this thing.

JOHN SOWDEN
Squealing?

MIKE
It's not squealing it's searching for a speed. It alternates high and low speeds constantly. I open up the refrigerator door and it seems to be coming from where I think the evaporator fan is on both the freezer and the refrigerator sides.

JOHN SOWDEN
Right. It's coming from the freezer section.

MIKE
Okay.

JOHN SOWDEN
And the fan is changing mode? It's not abnormal for it to increase and decrease speed according to temperature. So if you open up the door and let it remain open for a minute or two, you should hear it pick up speed and maintain that speed.

MIKE
Okay. Well this, it's like every two seconds, it will go high, then low, then high, then low, and that's without the refrigerator door being opened or anything being introduced to it.

JOHN SOWDEN
Yes. What happens is there's a thermistor that senses the temperature in the freezer or refrigerator section, whichever you're trying to monitor. The board normally has two or three of those in the unit and then that sends a signal back to the main control board that says, speed up the fan or slow down the fan. Now it's possible that thermistor is not

within tolerance and you're getting a lot of scrambled signals from that to the main board and then it's turning the fan up and turning the fan down, or its possible the board itself is misinterpreting the thermistor. You say it's done this since day one?

MIKE
Since day one.

JOHN SOWDEN
Have you had anybody out for service on this?

MIKE
No, I have not.

JOHN SOWDEN
Okay and you say its three years old?

MIKE
I'm guessing three to five years old. I've got a serial number if you need it.

JOHN SOWDEN
Well, what you might end up doing in order to, first of all, you're not losing any product, right? Its cooling fine?

MIKE
Oh, yeah. It's working great.

JOHN SOWDEN
What I was going to say is, you could try replacing the fan motor and see if that helps or not. I'd also check the thermistors. Normally, it will tell you what the resistance is supposed to be; generally at thirty-two degrees, you can throw it in a glass of ice water and check it with an ohmmeter (part # DM10T) to see if it's within tolerance or not but I would suspect either the thermistor is out of whack a little bit, or the fan itself is the problem. You may end up replacing the fan motor and the board to get it to work properly.

MIKE
Okay. Well, right now it's working just fine.

JOHN SOWDEN
I mean to get rid of the noise.

MIKE
It happens intermittently, more on then not.

JOHN SOWDEN

Again, that's why I'd lean more towards the fan motor. Try it, but again if it's intermittent that's the worst thing to diagnose. At this point, all you can do is start by replacing the most logical component. I'd start, again, with the thermistor and check those. If that's all right then I'd try a new fan motor and see if that helps. If not you might want to change the board as well, because on some units they've changed the duration of defrost times and how long it takes the unit after defrost to kick the fan back on. What happens on some units is that, after defrost you have some moisture in there, and the droplets will freeze on the blade and it goes back into refrigeration, and then you've got a fan blade that's got ice on it and it can cause it to wobble and some other issues. So like I said, you might end up replacing the board and the fan motor itself to solve that problem in the long term.

MIKE
Is this something that I might be able to tackle myself?

JOHN SOWDEN
It really depends on your do-it-yourselferness, for lack of better words but we do have a lot of people that do stuff like this. A lot of it is just wire for wire on the replacement. If there are normally any changes in the wiring, it will say so on the components. It will say on this board, this terminal was for the fan but now it's this other one, but most of it is wire for wire.

MIKE
Okay. Well where would I find out information on where these thermistors are?

JOHN SOWDEN
You can try RepairClinic.com! Go to our website and if you have a specific question just log in with your email address and we'll answer it. You can also look at the wiring diagram or troubleshooting guide on your refrigerator. Normally that's on the underside; remove the front panel and there will be an envelope on the side that will tell you where they're at.