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Do you know what this plant is? I find it at almost everyone's home... yes, it's poison ivy!



Issue  
**34**

Your Monthly Insight into Preventative Home Maintenance



# The Helpful Home

Summer Edition

newsletter



This summer edition of the Helpful Home Newsletter issue not only has a handy Summer Checklist to remind you to check various items around the house, but also includes some vacation tips that can help save you the grief of coming home to your very own "crime scene". We've included some explanations about our services and lots of information about my friends & the services they offer to homeowners like you. There's also some tales of the Money Pit (read this as things that happen around my old house...) And of course what would this newsletter be without some ranting about my own personal issues! We hope you enjoy this edition & will pass your copy on to others when you are done. Recycling saves paper & ink. We hope you are having a happy Summer! Best Wishes, Steve, Matt, Jason & Danny

## How To Ready Your Home for Your Next Vacation Trip

Summertime is not all barbeques and vacations... its burglary time. It's the time of the year where it becomes increasingly important to keep your guard up and watch out for your family and your neighbors. As more people find summer a time to take the kids and visit theme parks and relatives, the thieves and vandals come out of hiding & may be scoping out your neighborhood. Signs of families being away are often very obvious to the trained eye and if you follow some of these tips, maybe your possessions will stay...yours! Obviously, stopping the mail, newspapers and deliveries while you are away is a good first step. Piles of papers and circulars littering the front yard, is a dead giveaway you are gone and not paying attention to the news. Parking a car on the driveway is a good idea, even if a thief is very brazen, they will be

wondering who is staying at the home. Lights should be on random clock timers that copy normal room usage. Make sure porch lights go on at dusk and off at dawn. Do set your security alarm systems, and make sure some curtains and shades are left open so the place does not look closed up for the season. Ask a relative or trusted friend to check your home regularly. Unplug most of the appliances, computers & tvs, but leave one radio tuned to talk radio on. (softly). Make sure house numbers are easily read from the street in case the police are called. Call home occasionally

and make sure you empty your voice mailbox regularly. Obviously don't tell everyone you will be gone... the wrong person may be listening. Stay off facebook and don't put vacation pictures up before you return.

Your home should look like you are home...even if you're not!

Hire a service to mow your lawn and maintain the property. Pool owners, lock the gates and take in the ladders for above ground pools, or lock them in the up position. Unplug garage door openers and lock the doors. Lock the door from the garage to the home and deadbolt it. Make sure garden sheds are locked and that extension ladders are chained up, (cont'd p.5)

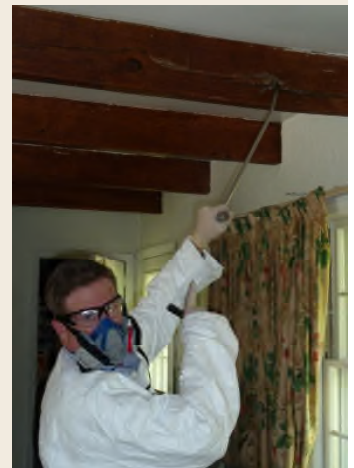
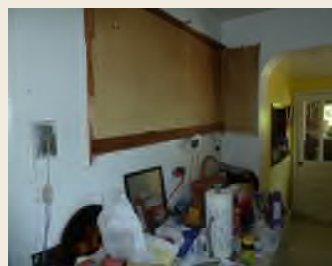


Protecting yourself and your family from shocks and electrocution has never been easier with circuit breaker Ground Fault Protectors (pictured to the top right) and local gfci protected outlets (right ,below) . These devices simply and quite effectively monitor the electricity going through them and when they sense an imbalance they trip before you can be seriously hurt. They are required by the building code for all damp locations including bathrooms, kitchens, bar sinks, outside your home and in the garage. Pools & spa equipment must also have GFCI protection. Breakers & outlets should be tested regularly to make sure they are functioning properly. Home inspectors typically test these during an inspection but homeowners are recommended to test them monthly for safety. An inexpensive GFCI tester will also tell you if the device was wired properly. Breakers sell for apprx. \$35, outlets about \$10



## Tales From the Money Pit...

My house just looks for ways to suck the money out of my wallet and eat up my time... This summer I am cleaning skylights, maintaining the above ground pool and have set up electrical wiring for the spot on the front circle, a light in the pool area and set up the new pool pump electrical. Busy, busy, busy I should have bought Home Depot stock! My wife is working in the garden, considering a storage shed for the garden area and wistfully dreaming of a concrete paver patio in the backyard. I have fencing waiting to be sprayed with stain and then it will need to be installed and I just cut apart the old gates that had warped and been damaged countless times by trucks and cars trying to enter my property. As the stock market keeps tanking and the economic picture looks bleak... I keep thinking about how much investing in the house is smart and how much might put us in some kind of jeopardy. I really don't think we are anywhere near there, but over time we all really need to balance creature comforts against return on investment. On the inspection forefront we did another home that could have doubled as an episode of the show "Hoarders". What a horror, stuff piled up and just filthy conditions, damages everywhere and a young couple contemplating a **huge project** way beyond their budget and abilities... now I understand when my mom cried in front of my first house. See photos below: All suited up with Tyvek suits and respirators, latex gloves & even that was hardly enough protection for what we saw. It's truly sad to see how some people are living. Anyway on a brighter note my clients found a nicer more do-able project that they are purchasing as we speak. **This home was just too needy for most buyers.**



Jason & Danny work on finding the kitchen. Oh there's lunch. We even found termites in a girder! While these homes are a challenge to inspect proper safety equipment is required.

# Summer Home Check List P. 3



Summer is a time for reading in a hammock, mowing lawns & maybe a few trips to fun places like museums, ballparks or the beach. As the hot weather peaks remember the shades, sunblock and stay hydrated whether you are working or playing. How's the patio or deck doing? Is the home showing some wear and tear? Now is the time to prep and powerwash your home and get it ready for touch-ups. And getting quotes from contractors before cold weather sets in should be done now. Planning a project? Getting plans drawn, securing written quotes and interviewing contractors takes time. Get out of the hammock & get going!

## Summer Tips for the Exterior:

**Rooftops:** As always make sure gutter system is clean and leaders are directing water away from the home. Do not climb on roofs when the temperatures soar as you can ruin many roofs when the material is very hot.

While tree work is best when the leaves have dropped have someone look at the health of your trees during the summer and develop a plan for fall trimming. Tree work is dangerous and pre-planning is critical. Make sure you hire only licensed insured people.

Walk around your home and look for any prep work that should be done while the weather is warm. Sanding, scraping and important prep before painting should be done properly and in cold or damp weather this may cost more or be skipped. Remember with the new lead laws contractors that work on older home (pre- 1978) MUST have taken a lead safe course and must carry a Lead Certificate showing they have been trained. Fines are substantial and the wrong contractor can end up making your family or the neighbors sick.

Check your hoses, hose reels and gaskets to make sure you are not wasting water.

**Safety items:** Check batteries on Smoke, Heat & Carbon Monoxide detectors, Make sure extinguishers are charged, and hang them in plain sight. Are your batteries fresh? Or are you waiting for the chirping at 2am. Do it now!



## Interior Things:

Summer cleaning time... look for those rodent droppings in the corners of the basement, on top of the foundation walls and vacuum them up. Be careful not to breathe the dust. Wear a face mask and wash -up afterwards. Rodents are a minor annoyance but the pee and poop everywhere so bait stations on the exterior of your home and closing up as many holes into the home is needed. Stop feeding the birds and squirrels and you'll also cut down on the nocturnal visits. Remember that your warm air furnace doubles as an air conditioner in summer... change those filters regularly. Make sure the filter is the correct size and that the cover or duct sealing tape is closed around the filter to keep out hot attic air or basement contaminants. Check gfci safety outlets and breakers. They all have test buttons for a reason, and should be tested monthly to assure safe operation. If you are still using an older whole house cooling fan at night make sure the fan is working properly and that attic items are not too close to the fan. Open bedroom windows a crack to allow cooler nighttime air in and install a timer to turn off the fan as the home will often become uncomfortably cool in the early morning hours and you will have to wake up to turn it off unless you have a timer. Newer room fan should be turned off when no one is using the room.

## Surprising things to know about Stonehollow and our inspections:



On every inspection with oil heating equipment, a service technician from Standard Oil Co. checks out those pieces of equipment as a free service for our clients. Pictured: Ed Webb from Standard All full Home Inspections receive a certified Pest & Wood Destroying Insect Inspection from Steve who has a State of CT Supervisory Pest Control License.



1. Take a few moments to hydrate... no not the beer... water. Excessive activity makes for perspiration (which is a good thing for natural cooling... ) but keep refilling your tank or you'll get sick. Heatstroke is no fun.
2. Wear a hat, that sun as lovely as it is can give you cancer... put on good gloves and eye protection before you start a project. Think paint mask or respirator if you are going to raise dust.
3. Clean & sharpen your tools. Throw away broken ones. A moment sharpening a blade might save you half the effort of doing the job. Dull tools can make a job much more dangerous.
4. Dump out containers that catch rain or hold water. Mosquitos can spread West Nile Virus and water sources are perfect places for them to lay eggs and create more baby mosquitos.
5. When working in the garden, don't touch your face with your gloves. That's one way I often spread poison ivy onto my forehead.
6. Take a little time and detergent and clean the garbage cans and recycle bins. Deodorizing will make them more pleasant in hot weather.
7. Organize your shed and garage shelves to allow easy access to garden needs and special tools.
8. Clean the gutters and make sure the leader drains are clear. Unfortunately this is a job that needs to be done regularly to make sure they are flowing and draining easily.
9. Test the auto reverse and the photo eyes on your garage door. Photo eyes should be no higher than 6" off the floor.
10. Bent or missing rake tines ? Don't be a cheap skate you've had the same rake for ten years! Go to Karp's Hardware and buy a new one. They've moved things around recently... ask for the garden section.
11. Having fresh gasoline in the mowers, blowers and weed-whackers can make them start quicker and run so much better. Air filters can often be cleaned and re-used... so clean them.
12. No one likes having rodents in the home... have a pest company add bait stations staked down under your shrubs outside to attract vermin before they get in. Do not leave poisons where kids or pets will be attracted to them.
13. If you use any herbicides, pesticides or strong chemicals be sure to frequently wash your hands and make sure you get plenty of ventilation. This goes for pool chemicals as well.
14. Don't let hoses run and leak all day. Fix gaskets and any small leaks or buy a new hose.
15. If you have a pool remember there are new statutes on anti drain entrapment to avoid drownings caused by swimmers unable to pull away from drain suction forces. Make sure your pool is set up in such a way as to balance or shut down if there is an entrapment situation. Watch those kids !
16. Check canine fences weekly to assure continuity as pets will wander off when they don't hear the fence tone. and having identification on their collars may save you hours of searching for them.

*Questions? Call us if you have a home issue or concern.*

*Please call our Client Hotline:*

**203-327-6824**

## When Lightning Hits Your Home...

There I was comfortable and happy in front of my big tv, sitting on my couch when the clap of thunder hit and all hell broke loose. My fire alarm system went off, the sirens were screaming, then my dad's alarm went off in their apartment... the massive power surge went through all our little integrated circuit boards frying every computer internet card, surveillance digital recorders, garage door openers, routers, modems and the like. My surge protectors protected some of the items, while others like dvd players, one flat screen tv and an air conditioner (although they were indeed "protected") they just couldn't handle the million volt surge.) Once we got the sirens turned off we realized there was big trouble at Casa Gladstone... the electronic phone system was messed up, one of those lamps you touch to turn on, and the voice mail system was out. I did a bit of searching and it seemed to point to the original strike was a direct hit on an old FM antenna that was still attached to the peak of the home. It wasn't even wired to anything but the surge jumped from the antenna to both low voltage and house voltage in the attic and spread through many circuits around the house. I was indeed curious to find out if this event was covered by my homeowners policy... my agent gave me the good news that I was fully covered for all repairs and replacements above and beyond my deductible... yeah, you guessed it \$5,000! I'm sure we'll come close, but I doubt we will exceed that number. So we are just going around the home fixing and replacing. Fortunately the tv was repaired for less than \$200, but the alarms were very expensive to fix. The piles of stuff that is broken just keeps mounting up. The thermostats would no

longer adjust for cooling and heating and oddly enough even the thermostat controlled attic fan was not responding. I sent the security camera dvr in for service as it was brand new and haven't gotten the news on that yet. The routers, modems and computers all were toast so we have installed new. And the hits keep on coming... one garage door opener doesn't work, the energy saver we plugged in a few years ago is no longer working, and my model railroad low voltage lighting is now not turning on...So what are the experts telling me? How can we prevent the next surge? The only real way it seems is to install lightning rods. Did you know lightning tops the list for homeowner insurance claims? Approx. 25% of home damages are blamed on lightning. And more than a billion dollars annually in structural damages according to Underwriters Laboratory Inc. One strike can generate over 30 million volts... yikes. So from this we learn you should only buy good surge protectors, make sure everything is grounded and try get a lower deductible on your homeowner's policy!

### Home Vacation Tips: (cont'd).

or better store them in the garage. Walk your property & think what could be put away or what would help to make the place less attractive to thieves. Look in windows and think about placing valuables out of sight. Consider a few well-placed security decals on sliders & basement windows. Wedge those sliders with wood dowels so they cannot be rocked and opened. Real or even imitation surveillance cameras will also drive thieves to look for easier prey. Finally turn off the washer valves, turn down the heat or a/c depending on the weather and shut off the main water valve to the home. Lower water heaters to the vacation position, put the garbage and recycling cans in the garage. And double check you've locked all the doors and windows. Hope you have a great vacation ! Let me know how it went.

.....  
Pssst did you know Steve is happy to speak to clubs, senior & fraternal groups about home concerns, safety and maintenance... just call us to set a date. Our special # [203-327-6824](tel:203-327-6824)

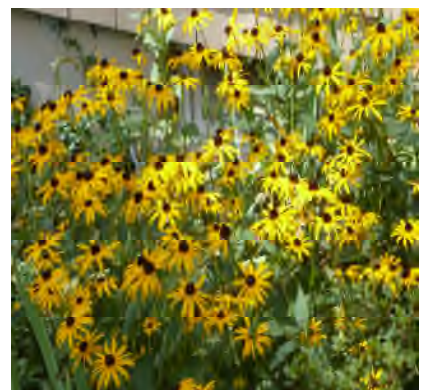


**Don't Forget! >>>**

Energy Audits are all the rage, but watch out! With limited training and little conscience more and more companies are offering to check your home for energy consumption. While the government is sponsoring and sometimes subsidizing these evaluations, buyers should beware many of these contractors who will test a home then sell you new windows, doors, insulation or whatever, may be ripping you off. Right now your best bet is to use the energy audit offered by CL&P as you are being assessed for the audits and customers receive them at about \$75.00 each. As the economy is weak and energy costs keep climbing, don't become another consumer who is ripped off or over-spends buying smoke and mirrors. Call us for advice or for an audit with no strings attached. If you are not sure if the company is legit, give me a call. Steve

Please visit our website for lots more good information and useful safety and maintenance tips for your home.

[www.stonehollow.com](http://www.stonehollow.com)





# Our Vendors

P. 6

Please tell them you heard about them on the Radio show , or in this Newsletter!

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Fall Home Checklist

Readying you home for cooler weather

Termites ... what to do when you see them

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Why I don't like "whole house fans"- they are old technology that can cause a negative pressure in the home drawing in outside contaminants like pollen, dirt and radon gas. Also it can blow out pilot lights and suck exhaust down chimneys and fireplaces and raise carbon monoxide levels... have you installed a CO alarm yet?



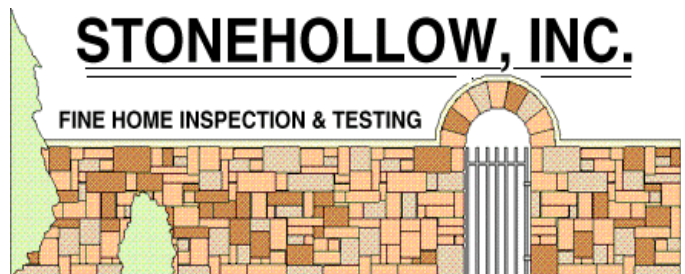
## Watch and Listen!

Archived Shows of Around the House with Steve Gladstone! On our web site and on

UStream.com Keyword: Around The House.Temp (several are on this web site).

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