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Garage Doors Openers – An Inconvenient Convenience?

Some Tips from Neighbors InDeed

BY DOUG BROWN

Our 2010-2011 winter has so far treated us to some frosty mornings. A couple of weeks ago we had sub-freezing temps here in Lincoln Hills, and guess what was the most popular call to Neighbors InDeed the next morning? You guessed it: “frozen” garage door openers.

Garage door openers are a virtual need. Who wants to get out of a car and open the garage door by hand? But these CONVENIENT devices are most INCONVENIENT when they, like tender plants, freeze up and won't work.

How can you help prevent such chilling moments? You're welcome to call Neighbors InDeed at 223-2763 and a Handy Helper will come over and do routine maintenance. But if you want to take matters into your own hands, here are some tips from Neighbors InDeed:

1. **CLEANING.** Garage door drives attract a lot of dust over time, and should be cleaned once a year. Use a wad of disposable paper towels and a SMALL amount of silicone spray to wipe off the “rail” that houses the screw-drive (most Lincoln Hills homes) or chain or belt drive. Do NOT use an oil-based lubricant (such as WD-40).
2. **LUBRICATION.** The most frequent causes of a frozen garage door opener are (a) inadequate lubrication or (b) treatment with the wrong lube. Your garage door opener rail should be lubricated once a year, right after cleaning. Use a SILICONE lube (available in all hardware/home maintenance stores) -- not an oil-based lube. The latter can cause build-up of wads of “gunk” that will be susceptible to freezing temps. We also suggest lubricating the mainspring coil and the three bearings on the shaft that holds the spring, as well as all hinges and rollers.
3. **REMOTE CONTROL.** Occasionally remote “clickers” will stop working. The first check should be the batteries – replace these about once every 2-3 years. Once the batteries are changed, you may need to re-program the switches in the motor housing. To do so, press the square-colored button, then, within 30 seconds, press the remote opener. When the system has accepted the code, the lights in the housing will flash twice. A few Handy

Helpers are trained to help you deal with such a problem, so feel free to call 223-2763 for help.

4. **BROKEN MAINSPRING.** Garage door openers operate four times for every exit + entry of each vehicle you own. Multiply that by the number of times you're "out and about" every day, and a two-person household can be operating a garage door opener around 5,000 times a year! In a number of ten-year-old Lincoln Hills homes, springs have broken after those 50,000 ups + downs, requiring replacement. Handy Helpers will NOT be able to do this sort of major job, but call Neighbors InDeed (223-2763) for referrals to reputable garage door companies that have your neighbors' endorsement. A word of caution: we do not advise trying to manually lift a 16' garage door whose spring has failed. They are extremely heavy and the risk of bodily injury is not worth it! Note: don't ever drive your car or be under a door WHILE it is opening or closing – that's when a spring is most likely to break and crash to the ground!
5. **INSULATION?** Some garage doors are insulated with sheets of foam. Is this necessary – and worth the cost? The principal benefit of insulation in our part of the world is keeping the heat OUT on hot summer days. In the winter, because you have air vents in your garage (don't block those!), insulation will not make much difference. If you do this yourself, a cooler garage on hot August nights could be worth the cost.
6. **REPLACEMENT?** The garage doors themselves that were installed in our houses by Del Webb and Pulte are neither the "Cadillac" nor "Edsel" of garage doors, but should last a long time if cared for correctly. A dent in your door (from being bumped by a vehicle) could eventually compromise the door's superstructure, so have a garage door company perform an assessment.

Remember, Neighbors InDeed is YOUR neighborhood volunteer organization, ready to assist you with home maintenance jobs, referrals to services, and medical equipment loans. Check out our website at www.neighborsindeed.org and/or pick up your phone and call 223-2763 if you need help.