

## All Stressed Out Again

By Joseph P. Guzzo

I often ask myself why I bother watching the news. It's more like a continuous Toyota commercial with short segments of the news in between. And then it's the same old news, who shot or stabbed each other, or who mistook the gas for the brake and drove through someone's building or house. I'm still trying to figure out how I can make jersey barriers look good in front of my house. I have this regimented routine and watching the news is just part of it, when I get up at 4:30 am, yes there is news at 4:30 am, and when I get home for the six o'clock news. It seems if I don't stick to my routine the whole day is shot.

Recently one morning there was a "**Seven News Breaking Story,**" at first I ignored it and thought it was just going to be a chance of showers the day after tomorrow. But then I heard the reporter say how hot the water is in public places, and showed a lavatory being tested for water temperature. Now this got my attention. So I watched but the special report wasn't going to be shown until the 11:00 pm news. That's eleven o'clock at night. I just had to watch it, but of course this would throw off my routine because I would have already been in bed for 2 hours. I have recorded with my V.C.R. before but I thought by the time I got it set up and refigured it out it would probably be 11:00 anyway. Besides I told myself normal people do stay up after nine o'clock. So I broke routine and stayed up to watch the special report about hot water, hoping they would get it right.

The seven news reporter Byron Barnett started off by asking the listeners if they knew just how hot the water could be in toilet rooms of public places, and just how dangerous it could be. He went to various places like restaurants and showed the temperature of the water at the lavatory, one went as high as 143 degrees. I was anxiously waiting for Byron to interview the Plumbing Inspector, and wondering who's Town it was. Then Byron said we checked with an expert, and started interviewing a licensed Home Inspector. My blood pressure immediately went through the roof, and I started yelling at Byron and the Home Inspector through the TV. What business does a Home Inspector have inspecting a commercial building, and pretending to know the plumbing code. Byron then said they researched the National Plumbing Code for the correct water temperature. Apparently neither Byron nor his expert the Home Inspector knew we have a State Plumbing Code 248 C.M.R. written by and enforced by Plumbing Inspectors. He went on to interview a Doctor about how dangerous and how easily a young child can be burned by hot water. And he finally mentioned the Board of Health. Not one mention of the actual enforcing authority of hot water temperatures for all plumbing fixtures, the Local Plumbing Inspector. Nor any mention of the State agency that oversees the code, the State Plumbing Board with the administration for the Board under the Division of Professional Licensure, which comes under the Office of Consumer Affairs.

Before I continue to complain let's talk about the code. If you read my recent article "Metering Faucets; The Truth Leaks Out" it would explain in detail what type of faucets are required for public lavatories, and the required water temperature at the lavatory. This was the focus of the news report. However our code has many water temperature requirements all plumbers are taught as part of the basics. Following are these important code requirements beginning with the definition of hot water.

*Hot Water, Water at a temperature of at least 120 degrees F.* It is very important to understand the intent for water to be at least 120 degrees at the source. Studies have shown water that is stored under 120 degrees did not kill bacteria that is developed naturally with stored water. I find myself reminding plumbers of this code requirement when other temperatures in some fixtures are required to be less than 120 degrees for safety purposes. Some plumbers will want to turn the water heater temperature down. Water temperatures for fixtures must be controlled at the particular fixture, or a dedicated and labeled hot water supply through a mixing valve.

*Basic Principle #3, Hot Water Required, Hot water must be supplied to all plumbing fixtures which normally need or require hot water for their proper use and function.* This is self explanatory. You cannot install a fixture with only cold water unless that's all it uses, like a water closet. A good example of trying to skirt this code are cheap or to be more polite frugal employers and even landlords that decide they cannot afford hot water or did not pay the utility bills and have fixtures like sinks with only cold water. That's a violation.

- Showers, maximum 112 degrees
- Public Lavatories, maximum 110 degrees
- Maximum water temperature for a water tank 200 degrees
- Maximum temperature for domestic hot water 130 degrees
- Maximum water temperature allowed to enter the drainage system 150 degrees

It is the Plumbing Inspector's duty and responsibility to enforce these and other important hot water code requirements. And it is the plumbing contractor's responsibility and liability to assure all water temperatures have been set according to code in all homes and businesses they are contracted to work in. Plumbers must be diligent when setting water temperatures. The plumber must communicate with the owners or managers about hot water temperatures, and always check them, even if they are there for unrelated work. Similar to a good auto mechanic that will check your oil or tire pressure, even if the vehicle is there for something else, it's just good business practice. And still more it protects both the consumer against injury, and you for liability. In school I would show my students a video about the dangers of hot water. It is a real eye opener. It shows tragedies and just how easy and quickly a young child can be burned by hot water. The video also explains the liability will always fall back on the plumbing contractor. They documented a personal injury case involving burns to a child caused by hot water. The plumber was sued for millions (and lost), years after the job was completed.

Plumbers and the plumbing industry in general have been climbing a mountain of credibility for ever. And for plumbing inspectors, many do not even know we exist. Evident by the news report by Byron Barnett, and the numerous calls I get transferred from the Building Inspector when someone calls to ask a question about plumbing or gas. Many ask for the Building Inspector or the Board of Health. I could go on and on with examples from TV commercials where master plumbers are reduced to bumbling drain cleaners, to TV sitcoms where plumbers are portrayed as the equivalent to janitors. If we want to correct this ignorant injustice plumbers must raise the bar, starting with how they run their business, and demanding more pride in workmanship. And weed out those plumbers that perhaps should be janitors. Not that there's anything wrong with being a janitor, don't want to upset the janitors. But plumbing is so much more complex today

especially with all the high tech equipment and technologies. And for Plumbing Inspectors you must demand respect, look professional, and act professional. Insist to the Building Inspector you must be able to perform thorough plan reviews before building permits are issued. And above all study the code every day. Anyone who still has the mind set that being a Plumbing Inspector is a good retirement job, must get out now.

Despite getting me all stressed out, I do appreciate Byron Barnett reporting about plumbing safety. But Byron next time you do a story about plumbing please call a plumber or a plumbing inspector, not a Home Inspector, that's just downright insulting.