



Happy Birthday, America!



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Guess Who!!

Some of you, no doubt, remember that movie with Sidney Poitier, "*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*". I was recently a recipient of that very question up front and personal!

I came home from the office one afternoon to the sound of crashing and banging. I looked around the house but saw nothing unusual so I went in the kitchen door. Right away I was confronted with a big, black furry creature who turned out to be a bear feasting on the contents of my refrigerator! He had already discarded the eggs and the grape jelly and spilled the stored hummingbird nectar in a sticky mess all over the floor. He was just beginning to work on the leftover food when I interrupted him.. As soon as he saw me, he bolted right back out the back door that I had neglected to lock when I left earlier. The first thought that came to mind was my two little dachshunds - where were they? Just then I saw two frightened pairs of eyes peeking around the corner and two little tails going a mile a minute to see a friendly face. Boy, do I wish dogs could talk!!

It's A/C Time - Good News and Bad

Most homes in Colorado Springs now have air conditioning systems that were not very prevalent 15 to 20 years ago. Homeowners who rely on older air conditioners for home cooling are facing the unpleasant prospect of replacing their cooling systems by the year 2020.

If you have a home air conditioner that was manufactured before January 1, 2010, it probably uses a refrigerant called hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC)-22 (also known as R-22). Because HCFC-22 depletes the Earth's protective ozone layer, EPA regulations are gradually reducing the production and use of this refrigerant. In fact, manufacturers can no longer make new air conditioners that use HCFC-22. However, HCFC-22 can still be used to service existing air conditioners and replacement systems using the old refrigerant can still be purchased as long as they are available. There is no ban on the sale of R-22 equipment; the new regulation only requires manufacturers to produce R-410 equipment.

Government regulations concerning environmental emissions and ozone depletion require replacement of R22 Freon with R410a Freon, a less environmentally damaging substance. But here's the bad news.

Air conditioners that use R22 Freon cannot use the new R410a type, and there is no retrofit or workaround that can enable the older technology to use the newer refrigerant. As a result, the transition from R22 to R410a Freon will mean most air conditioners from the last few decades will need to be replaced.

Between 2012 and 2020, the price of R22 Freon is expected to increase dramatically. As the phase-out deadline nears and available stocks of this refrigerant dwindle, prices are expected to climb even higher. In response, service and maintenance costs will also likely increase. In addition to expecting mounting costs for maintaining their existing air conditioners, homeowners must anticipate the daunting prospect of investing thousands of dollars in a new environmentally compliant cooling system.

To make the best of this situation, those who need to replace their air conditioners should consider it an opportunity to purchase a high-efficiency cooling system. These types of extremely efficient air conditioners tend to be more expensive initially, but they provide significant savings on monthly cooling bills. In many cases, the savings on utility expenses can pay for the new air conditioner by about the halfway point of the unit's useful life.

Now for the good news:

There is a product that has been developed as a transitional replacement for R-22. It's marketed as 407c and is commercially available for retrofit of existing equipment and as a long-term replacement option for R-22 in new equipment.

Using the appropriate retrofit guidelines, many R-22 systems can be retrofitted for use with Freon™ 407C to allow existing equipment to continue to operate safely and efficiently, even after R-22 is no longer available. It is cost effective to replace R-22 with R-407c before there is an emergency. Preventive maintenance programs should include strong suggestions to replace ozone-depleting refrigerants such as R-22 with environmentally friendly refrigerants and it seems that R-407c has become the front runner.

However, it is not recommended to drop R-407c into R-22 systems on top of the existing charge in cases of low refrigerant levels. A licensed professional should be contracted to completely remove the R-22 and as much of the mineral oil as possible. Always work with reputable dealers that employ service technicians who are EPA certified to handle refrigerants. When speaking with an air-conditioning service company, ask if their technicians are Section 608-certified. You can also ask a service technician to show you his/her certification card. One test question to ask would be, "Is it necessary to vacuum the system to remove all of the old refrigerant?" If the technician says no, find another company.

EPA website, June 5, 2017

My thanks to my friend, Jon Herman, with American Home Shield Home Warranty Company for sharing this information with me and allowing me to reprint it here for you.

Zillow - Zestimates - Guesstimates

One of the great evolutions in real estate over the last decade has been the power of the Internet, and more than 90 percent of homebuyers begin their search there. We think that's great, and buyers are more empowered than ever with loads of information.

Some of that information can come from sites like Zillow that offer what's called an "automated valuation model" — AVM for short — that purportedly presents a great estimate of the current market value of millions of homes. It's cool technology, amassing an enormous amount of information from publicly available sources in one place that is then scrubbed through very sophisticated algorithms to predict value. And all of that is presented in an easy-to-use user interface.

As real estate agents, we know that one of our most difficult tasks is pricing a home. That holds true whether we are representing a seller or a buyer. Market pressures change from week to week and from neighborhood to neighborhood. The motivation of the parties is always a factor, as is the condition of a home and those around it. No algorithm, however sophisticated, can quantify the value of a kitchen that was remodeled just before a home was put on the market or a yard that is poorly maintained. It simply isn't possible for any AVM to predict the value of a home with a level of accuracy sufficient to make a housing decision.

David Howell, The Washington Post

To its enormous credit, Zillow has done a tremendous job in reaching "top of mind" status with consumers. There's just one problem: Those predicted values are wildly inaccurate and inconsistent as is some of the other information. Research shows that, on average, those "Zestimates" are within 5 percent of the actual value of a home just half of the time. (Funny, that's what its research shows as well.)

I recently checked the Zillow site and found a statement saying there were 233 homes for sale in the 80906 area code. The Pikes Peak MLS, however, only lists 176 active listings in 80906 as of this writing. Not all homes for sale are listed on Zillow - and some of their current listings are actually sold or no longer available. Zillow requires Realtors and MLS providers to pay a fee in order to display a home for sale which sometimes runs contrary to a provider's policy of not selling its listings.

Bottom Line: Use Zillow as a starting point but don't rely on it solely when searching for a home. Zillow isn't trying to hide the imperfections of its "Zestimates". Just use the prices as a broad guideline. A comparable market analysis from a local real estate agent, as well as their experience in the market are the best ways to ascertain value.

I used to eat a lot of natural foods until I learned that most people die of natural causes.

Anonymous



Barbara

