

There's no place like home, AS LONG AS YOU CAN STAY THERE SAFELY

by Dan Howard

Just like Dorothy said in the Wizard of Oz, "There's no place like home." The modern version of those famous words is "Aging in Place". The goal is to be able to live in your home with your memories, freedom and possessions as long as possible.

From a senior citizen's point of view, no matter how good an assisted living facility is, it's still not "home." There is limited space for photos, treasured furnishings, and keepsakes. In some facilities, there may be rules about the time to wake and eat meals and how loud the TV can be set. Often they are away from familiar activities such as church and shopping and are usually more difficult for friends and family to visit.

The cost of living at home as compared to a facility is another major reason to live in the family home as long as possible. According to the AARP, on average across the country, the cost of a nursing home averages \$75,000 as compared to a cost of care at home of \$18,000 per year for each person.

As a society, we embrace the importance of helping seniors stay in their homes. There are programs to bring food and company, to provide home care, transportation and spiritual assistance. However, help with the physical home itself is often overlooked.

Based in Pittsburgh PA, Senior Home Safety Network is a national network of inspectors dedicated to helping seniors and their children too busy or too far away to

keep the parents home's safe. Now in more than 50 cities across the country, the goal is to help seniors to live safely in their homes as long as possible.

MANY TYPES OF SERIOUS DEFECTS ARE FOUND IN "AGING IN PLACE" INSPECTIONS

Legionella which often makes the news is more common than most people realize. A low temperature in the hot water tank can allow the Legionella bacteria to grow. Persons with compromised immune systems contract pneumonia from the Legionella, but the cause of the pneumonia is often not diagnosed, the illness is simply treated with antibiotic. Continued exposure can result in repetitive pneumonia episodes. Others with respiratory illness may find themselves unable to recover because of unknown mold contaminations in their home.

Many heating service people check whether a furnace will properly turn on, but do not check for blocked chimneys, carbon monoxide or other gas and fuel leaks. If a shortcut is taken in a new furnace installation, the service person isn't going to tell a homeowner, but an inspector will.

Undiscovered minor plumbing leaks can create major problems such as plaster damage or mold if not caught early.

It is not unusual to have leaks into electrical panels or overheating wires go

undetected until there are major problems such as damage to appliances or even a fire.

Stairs, decks or brick chimneys can be coming loose and not be noticed. Even if the homeowner knows what to look for, when it is a struggle to get through a day because of health issues, noticing a defect is just not easy.

Many times Senior Home Safety Network inspectors have prevented contractor fraud or provide more economical solutions saving seniors their precious money.

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP SENIORS LIVE SAFE IN THEIR HOMES AS LONG AS POSSIBLE

Hang a marked medical information bag near the front door. This can be as simple as a canvas bag labeled "Medical Information." Medical information is critical during a medical emergency. Having this bag in plain sight can make a life or death difference.

Install a keyless combination door lock at an exterior door. A code combination lock can provide access to friends, relatives or emergency personnel without the delay that usually occurs before someone is willing to break down a door.

Add an exterior blinking light for emergency personnel. Cost for this should be under \$20.00.

Purchase a freeze alarm. Snowbirds

and winter vacationers alike can avoid the possible flooding and major damage of their home if the heat goes out and pipes freeze. There are alarm units that will call out to another phone number before homes or crawl spaces freeze. Many of these are available for under \$ 100.00.

Seniors should learn to Skype. This is great for seeing grandchildren. It also gives peace of mind to relatives by letting family members see that mom or dad is doing well.

Change bathroom doors to open out toward the hallway instead of into the bathroom. Many medical emergencies happen in the bathroom. If the door opens outward, help can enter a bathroom without breaking down a door over a fallen person.

Change turning door knobs to lever handles—when trying to get through a door to call for help or escape a fire, it can make a life or death difference.

Many home accidents happen getting into or out of the bathtub. Changing from a bathtub to a shower can cost thousands of dollars, but is much less expensive than having a broken hip.

For links to additional information about home safety for seniors, go to: www.envirospect.info/SHSN. For environmental consultation call 724 443-6653. Dan@EnviroSpectofWesternPA.com. Like us on Facebook or connect @Dan-Howard251.

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