

Daily Union Article  
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Title "Home Appliances Are Not Created Equal!"

I remember the clothes washer we had when I was a kid. We had to walk down open wooden stairs with no railing to get to the unfinished basement to do our laundry. In my house, my former army dad insisted that each person in the family took care of our own laundry at a pretty young age. As one of six in my family, I didn't understand why he pushed that chore on to us when we were so young. However, now as the mom in a house with three boys, I get it!

As a child, it seemed that our washer was running every night during the week and overtime on weekends...until one day, it didn't. Sure, it filled with water, but that's all it would do. As my dad manually drained the water and moved the soggy clothes over to our plastic baskets so that he could take a closer look at it, it became evident that it needed more than a new belt. What resulted was dirty clothes chaos and laundry mat mayhem until we could get it repaired or replaced.

Even if you can't relate with high volume laundry in your own home, you likely have found yourself without a functional washing machine. According to a recent Consumer Reports (CR) magazine, when consumers like you and I purchase a new appliance, be it a washing machine, refrigerator, or air conditioner, we expect it to last as much as 10 years. However, CR member surveys regarding large home appliances, revealed that owners end up spending money on repairs within the first 5 years. These same members also report that reliability is more important to them than price or performance when making appliance purchases.

Large appliances are often a major expense for your home. Over the past 30, there have been significant levels of technology added to the machines and fewer repair service providers to make house calls. Additionally, repairing the appliance can often be nearly as costly (or more costly) to repair it. A 2016 Consumer Reports survey reveals that nearly 40% of appliance repairs were not made during the first service call. Replacement parts often need ordered which not only delays the repairs, but increases repair expense to pay for the technician to make another visit to your home. Additionally, appliance manufacturers more commonly contract out the repair work needed on their appliances that are still under warranty. This leaves you hanging while your appliance is down and you wait for an available contracted technician to arrive at your home.

With all this in mind, it makes sense that the average consumer wants – no *needs* – reliability. My family could perhaps get by a day or two, at the most, without a functioning clothes washer. Catching up the laundry after such a short amount of down

time would require diligent effort, though. I must have a reliable washing machine in my home or things get stinky fast!

Is reliability that big a challenge? Unfortunately, yes! CR reported that, based on their 2018 surveys, 15-40% of appliances, on average, will develop problems or break down within the first five years. The CR researchers point out that there is no one brand that gets consistently high rankings across all types of large appliance. A company may have exceptional ratings for their dishwasher, while falling to the bottom of the pile in multiple other appliances they manufacture.

As I read through the results posted in the August 2019 Consumer Reports issue, I took inventory of my home's major appliances. So far, I am running on luck and have beat the odds with the brand of refrigerator I have. My stove has been struggling to maintain an even temperature, but my washer is in it's prime. After all, it was just purchased last year! How do things look in your home? Have you had to contribute to the appliance graveyard lately, as I have? Disposing of these large machines has its own cost, too.

Consider the environmental impact being made by large appliances that have short lives. For example, when a washing machine cannot be repaired, it will eventually be found in the waste stream. While you bare the expense of a replacement, our landfills and/or recycling plants bare the "cost" of absorbing another large mass of metal, plastic and circuitry.

So what can you do to help shift the playing field from the "disposable" mentality that many manufacturers have established to a mindset that large appliances should once again have long lives?

First, do your research before you purchase your next large appliance. Go to the local public library and look in to the reports on appliances. Research your selection options using the internet, consumer reports, or other reliable resources.

Don't be drawn in by the name brand alone. Just because you have reliable dishwasher, it doesn't mean that the same brand offers a great clothes dryer or refrigerator.

With your research in hand, don't be swayed to purchase an appliance that has all the newest gadgets. The sales associate may demonstrate some very interesting features, but if the machine is not reliable, you won't be satisfied for long.

Perhaps when we consumers use our voting dollars to purchase reliable appliances, then manufacturers will get the message that we are tired of disposable machines that break down frequently and are too expensive to repair.

Until next time, keep living resourcefully!