

Dear Maintenance Men:

The kitchen counter tops in my rental units are old and tired looking. I want to upgrade but I am confused about which counter top material will be best. Can you go over the pros and cons of some of the more popular counter top surfaces available?

John

Dear John,

We are lucky today to have so many choices of countertop materials available. The four most popular materials are plastic laminate, granite, engineered stone and ceramic tile. Plastic laminate, or better known as Formica Brand, is still the most popular choice for apartment counter tops. This is because the choice in colors is almost unlimited and the ease of installation keeps the costs down. With proper care, plastic laminate will last for years; however, it can be easily scratched by knives or scorched by hot pots. Laminate counter tops can be easily installed by the average handy man, DIY person or contractor. Granite counter tops in the apartment industry are very popular and with good reason. The cost of granite has come down to reasonable levels and the upgraded look of a granite countertop is substantial. They are very tough and are resistant to staining, scratching and scorching. Granite counter tops will need to be professionally installed and sealed periodically.

Engineered stone countertops are almost as popular as granite, and are slightly more expensive than granite. Popular brands are DuPont and Silestone. Engineered stone countertops are composed of quartz particles and resins and the surface is smooth, non-porous and scratch resistant. They require less maintenance than granite. Engineered stone countertops are not DIY friendly and will need professionally trained installers.

Ceramic tile countertops have been around almost as long as plastic laminate. They can be installed by the average handyman, DIY person or contractor. They are heat and stain resistant. Ceramic tiles do need to have periodic maintenance to keep the grout lines clean and sanitary. From a management and maintenance perspective, we are finding granite countertops to be the top choice. The price difference between laminate and granite is close enough to warrant upgrading to granite. If you intend to hold onto your investment for a long time, granite will more than pay for itself.

Dear Maintenance Men:

My plumber just informed me that my ten-unit building has "Type M" copper piping. He says Type M has thinner walls than the more robust "Type L" copper pipe. Could this be the reason I am having more water line pinhole leaks?

Dave

Dear Dave:

A number of things can cause copper water line pinhole leaks. Having the thin ner Type M copper pipes may result in your property having pinhole leaks sooner than with the thicker Type L pipe. However, thin Type M pipe is often only a contributing factor when it comes to pinhole

leaks. Typically, water chemistry, incoming water pressure, recirculation pumps and poor construction methods are part of the contributing factors in pipe leaks. Check with your city or water distributor in your area to get information on the water chemistry and hardness. Adding a water softener to the incoming water supply will help protect both the pipes and water heater. Reducing the water pressure with a pressure regulator will reduce stress on the pipes. If you have a recirculation pump for the water heater, it will help to install a timer to control the amount of time the pump is active. Moving water produces a lot of friction in the pipes. Set the timer to operate the pump only during high demand hours. Doing these easy fixes may add life to your existing pipes. If poor construction methods are involved, repiping may be your only solution in addition to the above solutions.

Dear Maintenance Men:

I install a new battery powered smoke and CO detector into each unit before a new tenant moves in. The tenants moving into the apartment unit must sign a smoke detector agreement along with the rental agreement. The smoke detector agreement requires the tenant to check the detector for operation and replace the battery once a year. Should I be doing anything else or am I covered?

Bill

Dear Bill:

We are not lawyers and cannot answer as to your possible liability in the matter of smoke and CO detectors. However, our guess is the brand new battery you installed at the beginning of your resident's occupancy is currently operating a remote control toy. Our thoughts on smoke detectors are simple: They are cheap, install more than one and check them yourself regularly. From the property management view, most insurance companies require that you keep a smoke detector log on each unit and that they are checked every six months or at least once a year. The log does not need to be elaborate. Our Smoke Detector Log has the property address at the top, with eight columns. We recommend you keep a similar log for each CO detector you install.

1. Unit number
2. Number of Detectors
3. Check Detector: split column with Good/Bad
4. Battery Replaced: yes/no
5. Detector Replaced: yes/no
6. Initials: the person who did the checking should initials or sign
7. The Date of Inspection
8. Comments: such as whether the battery was missing or the detector was damaged, etc.

As an added precaution, we check the smoke and CO detectors every time we enter a rental unit regardless of the reason we are there. We make a note of the impromptu inspection on the Smoke Detector Log. Be sure to include the date and the person who checked the units. It helps

Written by Jerry L'Ecuyer & Frank Alvarez

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us sleep at night.

Note: If you would like to see your maintenance question in the "Dear Maintenance Men:" column, please send in your questions to: BuffaloQuestions@gmail.com

Feel free to contact Buffalo Maintenance, Inc., at 714-956- 8371, for maintenance work or consultation; or JLE Property Management, Inc., at 714-778-0480 for management service or consultation. Jerry L'Ecuyer is a licensed contractor and real estate broker. Jerry has been involved with apartments as a professional since 1988. Frankie Alvarez is the Operations Director of Buffalo Maintenance, Inc., and can be reached at 714-956-8371 or Frankie@BuffaloMaintenance.com. Websites: www.BuffaloMaintenance.com and www.ContactJLE.com and www.Facebook.com/BuffaloMaintenance.