

Plumbing Problem-Solvers

by Patrick McCombe

These devices tackle common plumbing predicaments without breaking the budget

Most contractors are happy leaving pipes, fittings, and bath fixtures to the plumber, but at some point you're likely to get your feet wet dealing with some kind of plumbing situation, especially if you're a remodeler. Even if you never touch a pipe wrench, it's generally your job to spec appropriate products and maintain the budget. Whether you're holding the purse strings or the propane torch, the plumbing industry

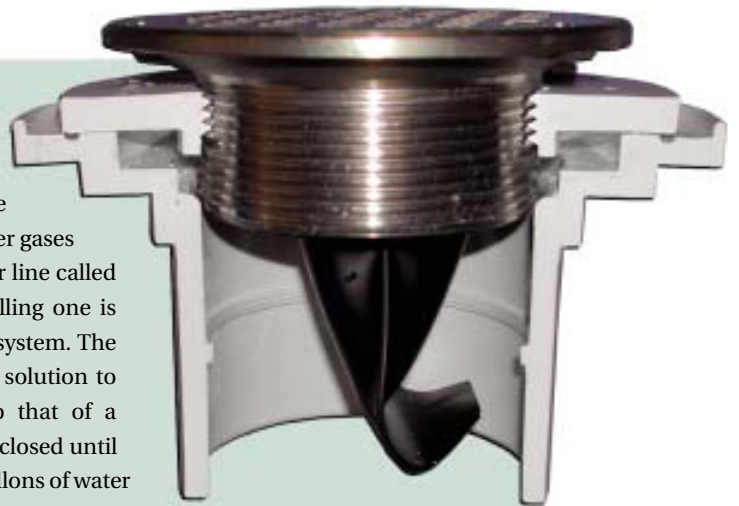
wants to help. Plumbing manufacturers are constantly introducing products designed to remedy common problems or help plumbers work more efficiently, but builders and remodelers who seldom venture into the plumbing-supply house and don't read plumbing trade magazines are often the last to know about them.

Here's a collection of tools and products that could save you time and money, or get you out of a jam.

Trap-Primer Replacement

Inactive drains can present a serious problem: Without regular replenishment, the water that creates the trap seal evaporates, allowing potentially dangerous sewer gases to leak into the building. Usually, a small-diameter water line called a trap primer is used to keep the trap filled, but installing one is expensive and adds complexity to an otherwise simple system. The ProSet *Trap Guard* is an elegant alternative and a great solution to stinky, seldom-used drains. With a design similar to that of a common party favor, the Trap Guard's plastic tube stays closed until the drain is needed; when opened it can drain up to 33 gallons of water per minute. The device comes in several fire-rated drain assemblies, or the insert alone can be used in retrofit situations. The maker says the product can also be used to provide emergency drains in laundry and mechanical rooms, especially in multifamily buildings. Prices for the insert alone range from \$27 to \$40; drain assemblies start at \$36.

■ ProSet Systems, 800/262-5355, www.trapguard.com





PVC Grinder

Once plastic pipe and fittings have been glued together, you can't get them apart again, and the usual solution — cutting back and inserting a coupler — isn't always an option. RectorSeal's *Golden Pipe Shredder* uses carbide cutters to grind out pipe from the hub end of plastic fittings. This tool looks handy for jobs like replacing toilet flanges and sink-trap stub-outs. It's sold for \$299 in a kit containing 1½-, 2-, 3-, and 4-inch sizes packed in a plastic case.

■ **RectorSeal**, 800/231-3345, www.rectorseal.com

Sweat Prep Tool

Cleaning tube and fittings for sweat connections is often the slowest part of working with copper pipe, but you can pick up the pace and make it easier on yourself with a *CopperKey*. This ratcheting brush provides greater leverage and cleans quicker than other fitting brushes, claims the manufacturer. The ½-inch model sells for \$19 and the ¾-inch version for \$20.

■ **General Pipe Cleaners**, 800/245-6200, www.drainbrain.com



First-Class Flange

One of my first tasks as a greenhorn handyman was replacing a broken cast-iron toilet flange. Since then, I've been on a quest for a better closet flange. I may have found it recently when I discovered the *TKO* from Sioux Chief at my local home center. Not only does this closet flange have a rust-proof, stainless steel ring, it also has a built-in plug for pressure testing. With stainless steel fasteners holding it down, the thing should last forever. It costs about \$8.

■ **Sioux Chief**, 800/821-3944, www.siouxchief.com



Backflow Preventer

Floor drains can reduce the severity of many plumbing mishaps — with one major exception: sewage backups. Does your project include a floor drain? If so, consider installing a *Flood-Guard*. This flood-protection device is quite simple. When effluent reaches the level of the floor drain, it lifts a rubber float that closes off the opening. When the water recedes, the float lowers and the floor drain works normally. The Flood-Guard comes in 2-, 3-, and 4-inch sizes and installs in minutes with only a screwdriver, says the manufacturer. Prices range from about \$10 to \$14. The company also makes a similar product for stand pipes.

■ **General Pipe Cleaners**, 800/245-6200, www.drainbrain.com

The Insider

The *Pipe Shooter* internal pipe cutter chucks into your cordless or electric drill and cuts plastic pipe from the inside. The design allows you to cut drain stub-outs flush or below finished surfaces, and the replaceable blade works with both ABS and PVC pipe. I found the 4½-inch standard size on the Web (www.hvactool.com) for \$18.50 and the longer, 7½-inch version for \$22.50.

■ **Atlanta Special Products**, 800/327-3552, www.pace-asp.com (site currently under construction)



Quick Fix for Shower Drains

A leaky shower drain in a slab-on-grade foundation is a difficult problem. The traditional solution is to pull up the pan and replace the drain. Unfortunately, you usually have to demo the walls to get out the pan, and you may have to break up the floor as well. You may be able to skip the mass destruction with the *Davke 4000 Shower Drain*. This solid-brass drain (far left, top) slips



inside an existing trap assembly and secures to the shower pan with a two-part epoxy included in the kit. The product's inventor does point out that because it reduces the inside of the drain to 1½ inches instead of the code-required 2 inches, this is not a code-compliant repair, but he says that the drain's performance is not hindered. The Davke 4000 sells for about \$80. The company also makes two other unique shower drains. Both secure to the pan with three screws instead of a large nut, which makes them easier to install in tight spaces. The *Davke 2000* (\$30 to \$40; above) has a no-caulk seal and the *Davke 3000* (\$35 to \$45; far left, bottom) has a lengthened tailpiece and attaches to the trap with a no-hub connector.

■ **Davke**, 509/764-0550, www.davke.com



Tub-Drain Turner

Removing a tub drain is challenging enough when the cross arms are intact, but it's virtually impossible when they're broken. A new tool from RectorSeal promises to make this job — with or without the cross arms — a whole lot easier. Constructed of tempered steel and operated with a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch drive ratchet, the *Golden Extractor* tub-drain tool grips the inside of the drain with a toothed cam; turning the ratchet tightens the grip. The tool is similar to the stud extractors used by auto technicians, and is also useful for removing bolts and screws with broken heads. It lists for around \$42.

■ **RectorSeal**, 800/231-3345, www.rectorseal.com

Stack-Free Venting

Running new plumbing vents through an existing roof is labor-intensive and often requires coordinating at least two and sometimes three different trades. Air-admittance valves like the Studor *Mini-Vent* can eliminate the need for multiple rooftop atmospheric vents (you must have at least one) and their accompanying roof cuts and flashing. Placed inside an attic or other accessible place, the Mini-Vent's one-way valve lets air into the drainage system while preventing sewer gas from escaping. It's code-approved in 29 states — all of the states that have adopted the IPC, plus a few others. The Mini-Vent fits on either a 1½- or 2-inch stack, and in many cases can handle an entire bathroom. It lists for about \$30.

■ **Studor**, 800/447-4721, www.studor.com



Auto Shutoff Supply Line

Shortly after a friend of mine moved into his new home, a flexible supply line serving the bathroom sink ruptured. He was at home when it happened, so the situation wasn't as disastrous as it could have been. This is just the kind of mishap the *FloodSafe Auto-Shutoff Connector* is designed to prevent. Available in common sizes for faucets, toilets, ice-makers, dishwashers, and washing machines, the braided stainless-steel supply line has a built-in device near the inlet that shuts off the water whenever excess flow is detected. One caution: If your customer runs the faucet without the aerator, this may actuate the shut-off, and then you'll have to remove the line from the valve to reset it. According to the manufacturer, this supply line costs "slightly more" than a conventional one.

■ **Watts**, 800/617-3274, floodsafe.watts.com



High Rise

If you've ever tried hooking up a conventional bathtub, you know that there's usually not enough room between the bottom of the tub and the floor to make the drain connection without cutting the floor. This can be a real problem when you're installing a tub on top of a slab or when there's a joist in the way. Sterling recently introduced an *Above Floor Drain* option for several of the company's popular 5- and 6-foot Acclaim, Ensemble, and Performa tubs and tub/showers. The option raises the tub bottom about 3 inches off the floor (as opposed to the typical $\frac{3}{4}$ inch). The additional space provides enough room to hook up the drain without cutting into the floor. With the option, a 60-inch Performa model in white has a list price of \$185.

■ **Sterling**, 888/783-7546, www.sterlingplumbing.com

The Hole Solution

Because modern plumbing codes no longer allow two-handle shower valves, some inspectors might require a changeover to a single-handle pressure-balancing model when other plumbing work is going on in the bathroom. To cover up the leftover valve holes, use a Symmons *RC Remodel Cover Plate*. The best part about the 13-by-8 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch plate is that it doesn't look like a retrofit item. It works with most Symmons shower valves, including the Temptrol, Temptrol 2000, Temptrol II, Olde Braintree Brass, and Allura models. Together, the RC cover and pressure-balancing valve shown (model D-86-2-LAM-OP) cost \$166.

■ **Symmons**, 800/796-6667, www.symmons.com



In Hot Water

With many of today's showers pumping out more water than a car wash and some whirlpool tubs taking up more space than a kiddie pool, a traditional 40-gallon hot-water tank may not provide enough hot water. Originally designed for commercial use, Bradford White's *EF Series* water heaters are increasingly showing up in large homes. Available in 60-gallon models with burners that produce from 125,000 to almost 200,000 Btu per hour and in 100-gallon versions that produce 150,000 to 300,000 Btu per hour, EF-series heaters can be direct-vented up to 120 feet with 3-inch plastic pipe or 170 feet with 4-inch pipe. All models incorporate Hydrojet sediment reduction, meant to minimize the sediment buildup that can slow recovery times and lead to premature failure.

■ **Bradford White**, 800/523-2931, www.bradfordwhite.com



Weight-Loss Plan

Working alone reduces overhead and eliminates the frequent headaches associated with employees, but there are some tasks you just can't do solo. Moving a cast-iron tub is one of them. However, you might be able to handle the *Gibraltar* from Eljer by yourself. The enameled-steel tub has all of the attributes of a cast-iron unit, says the manufacturer, but at 89 pounds it's easier to handle; built-in stabilizer bars on the tub bottom help make the product easy to level and carry. This tub sounds perfect for urban walk-ups and other situations where hauling in a heavy cast tub would be practically impossible. A 5-foot model in white lists for \$405.

■ **Eljer**, 800/423-5537, www.eljer.com

Flood Gate

I've seen many methods for protecting homes from ruptured hoses and other washing-machine accidents, but few are as easy to install as the *FloodStop*. Suitable for both new and retrofit installations, the device includes a floor-mounted sensor and a pair of valves that install at the outlet box. When the sensor detects water, it closes the valve and activates an alarm. It sells for about \$80. The company makes similar shutoff devices with $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch compression, $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch compression, $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch NPT, and $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch hose fittings.

■ **OnSite Pro**, 800/667-4833, www.onsiteproducts.com



No Sweat

Despite a recent proliferation on the market of plumbing fittings that connect to copper tubing without soldering, these products are still pretty expensive and tough to find. *Just-For-Copper Pro* provides a simple and inexpensive way to join copper fittings without solder. The single-part epoxy adhesive permanently joins copper fittings for potable water, heating, and refrigeration systems easily and without the risk of fire, says the maker; fittings will hold 200 psi within seven minutes of application and 500 psi within 24 hours. The pipes can have a little water in them — even a steady drip, says the manufacturer — but the fittings must be well-cleaned before joining. A 50-gram bottle of Just-For-Copper makes about 200 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch connections and sells for about \$25.

■ **Jackson Industries**, 866-304-5335, www.justforcopper.com

