Things that go boom in the night

By BILL GARWOOD
For the Journal-Constitution
Published on: 02/08/07

Q: On cold nights after the heat goes off, we hear a loud bump or cracking noise, like the house is being hit by a sledge hammer, followed by another lesser bump. What can we do to eliminate this noise? We have a new furnace, but the noise is not from the furnace.

A: Although the sound does not appear to come from your furnace, I suspect it comes from close by. The supply ductwork closest to your furnace is called the supply plenum. When the warm air from the furnace heats the metal walls of the plenum, they expand. Then, especially in exceptionally cold weather, when the furnace goes off, the walls of the plenum cool rapidly, causing them to contract and pop back into place. This contracting of the metal can be rather loud and annoying. The sound can also reverberate through the ductwork system, making it appear to come from different places.

Since you have a new furnace, I suspect that some change was made in the attachment of the new furnace to the existing plenum. I would call your heating contractor on a day when he can hear the noise. He likely has encountered this type of phenomenon before and will have some suggestions for you.

Q: The concrete floor in our master bathroom is uneven, and the commode was leveled with wood shims. After removing the wood (bad smell), we have a rocking commode. What can we do?

A: Rocking commodes are surprisingly common. There are several products available for properly shimming an unstable toilet. They range from small rubber pads to small plastic shims.

Use a level when installing the shimming material to make sure the toilet is set properly. After the shims are installed, gently rock the commode side-to-side and front to back. If it feels stable, you have been successful. Finally, caulk the gap between the commode and floor with a good quality tub and tile caulk treated with an anti-mildew additive.