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HACK YOUR HOUSE

five essential household hacks

by Jeffrey Tucker





HACK YOUR HOUSE FIVE ESSENTIAL HOUSEHOLD HACKS

GUIDE 1.0

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1970s, and in the most stealthy way, government at all levels began to unravel the gains civilization had made over the century in household management. Through regulations, bans, restrictions, and controls, essential domestic functions have been seriously compromised. Think of all the great advances: indoor plumbing, showers and baths, washing machines, dishwashers, refrigerators, and flush toilets. What would life be like without them? None of us can even imagine. But the government apparently can imagine it, because its regulatory apparatus is gradually taking them all away.

To be sure, government once pretended to do good things



for us like build parks, boost income, bring electricity to rural areas, and the like. Today, it is the opposite. It sees its role as restricting and tearing down what the private sector creates—for our own good. This is why it is constantly telling us that it must curb our lifestyles. The regulators restrict what we consume, control what we do, crack down on our ability to live a good life.

If some activity is going well, some new item is making life better, some food or gadget is newly popular, you can be sure that some bureaucrat is plotting to restrict its use or ban it. The ethos of the public sector has completely changed from fifty years ago. Instead of serving us, politicians on both the left and the right imagine that their main role is thinking of ways to control how we live, direct how we spend what money we make, and take away freedoms and rights once taken for granted.

Consider the example of the use of cellphones in cars. When everyone got one, people were just getting used to how to be both productive and safe. Phones were made that enabled hands-free talking. New cars were building the functionality into the dashboard. Voice activation was growing more sophisticated by the day.



There are certain obvious government regulations that are annoying. Environmental regulations prevent us from developing our property. We must restrict our water usage. We can only create so much trash and then it must be separated by type. We can't travel on planes with wine openers. We can't just hire or fire whom we want. We can't bank where we want. We can't even surf the Internet in peace without fearing that knock at the door.

All of this is true. But in this guide I'm more concerned about a second type of government regulation that degrades our lives in ways of which we are not always aware. I've learned over the years how to detect these. If there is something particularly annoying going on, and it doesn't make sense why, look more deeply . You are likely to find a bureaucratic rule of some sort lurking out there. It is usually hidden from public view. The cause and effect are hard to detect. But look hard enough and you find it.

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Let me just give one example from the kitchen. Beef and chicken broth and stock that you buy at the store are famous-



ly bad. But is this the fault of the manufacturers? Hardly.

Government controls food labeling like Stalin ran the Kremlin, defining precisely what can and cannot be called a stock. The US Department of Agriculture is clear: a stock must have a moisture-to-protein ratio of 135:1. This means that the stuff is mostly water—an ounce of meat to a gallon of water—a result of these government definitions of what is and isn't stock.

But do people know this? Hardly anyone does! We all use stock in our homes. It is the foundation of a vast number of meals. We pay and pay to try to get good quality ingredients. In this case, and there are a million more, it is not possible because the government restricts the manufacturers. You can't sell anything called stock that deviates from these mandates. People figure that the manufacturers are the problem, but the real problem is the government itself.

Now, this might not sound like a big deal (actually I think it is). But repeat this scenario a million, 10 million, 100 million times, for every product or service on the market, and you create the equivalent of a Soviet-style central plan that prevents society

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from improving and degrades our lives bit by bit until civilization itself is under threat. If our washing machines don't work, and our plumbing doesn't work, and we can't get rid of bugs on our property, can't get jobs for our kids, and so on, at some point we will wake up and find progress stopped and rolled back.

It has happened before in other places. Before the revolution in Cuba, the island was a booming, progressing, developing paradise. After the revolution, and socialism controlled the country, all progress stopped. Truly, it literally stopped, as in frozen in time, like the land that time forgot. Nothing new ever happened. Visitors in the 1990s would return with photos that might as well have been taken thirty years earlier except that everyone looked decrepit and depressed. After progress stops, decline sets in, as it did in Russia and China, where lifespans actually fell over time.

Fortunately there are some things we can do to fight back. The results are not perfect. There are some things we just can't get, such as a toilet with a three- or four-gallon tank (unless you are willing to risk smuggling in one from Canada or Mexico). Actually, I've heard of some people with money and time to burn who have built new homes with toilets imported from



all lands. They've also customized their home electrical and water systems to get around federal restrictions, even to the point of becoming completely independent of public utility systems.

Most of the rest of us cannot go this far. We are stuck with the homes, fixtures, and appliances we have. But at least knowing how badly they've been compromised does make a difference.

Here are 5 hacks to dramatically improve your life right now:

- 1. Hack your showerhead.**
- 2. Crank up your water pressure.**
- 3. Crank up your water heater.**
- 4. Add TSP to your laundry soap.**
- 5. Stock up on soon-to-be-banned products.**

1. HACK YOUR SHOWERHEAD

If you head to the Delta Faucet website, you will see a notice about flow restrictors in their showerheads. "While it is possible to remove flow restrictors from showerheads, we strongly advise against it for several reasons. Flow restrictors for faucets are an integral part of most aerators and it is generally not possible or desirable to remove them."

Is that so? Of course it is not so. Showers in the old days were fantastic. They covered us with water—hot water—and kept us clean.

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Then government got involved to regulate how much water the bureaucrats think we should be using. The result was the mandate that every showerhead had to be deliberately degraded. The words on the Delta website reflect fear of government and have nothing to do with reality.

Today smaller manufacturers have found profits in advertising showerheads with “removable” flow restrictors. These are best, but you can also remove them from the showerheads you get at the big-box hardware stores. Once I had to actually take a drill to the thing to make it happen, but it can be done. And it must be done or else you find yourself running around in the shower trying to get yourself covered with the pathetic trickle that the government has mandated for us.

You might have some vague memory from childhood, and perhaps it returns when visiting someone who lives in an old home. You turn on the shower and the water washes over your whole self as if you are standing under a warm-spring waterfall. It is generous and therapeutic. The spray is heavy and hard, enough even to work muscle cramps out of your back, enough to wash the conditioner out of your hair, enough to leave you feeling wholly renewed—enough to get you completely clean.

Somehow, these days, it seems nearly impossible to recreate this in your new home. You go to the hardware store to find dozens and dozens of choices of shower heads. They have three, five, seven, even nine settings from spray to massage to rainfall. Some have long necks. Some you can hold in your hand. Some are huge like the lid to a pot and promise buckets of rainfall. The options seem endless. But you buy and buy, and in the end, they disappoint. It’s just water, and it never seems like enough.

Here is one example of why, from the Santa Cruz City Water Conservation Office: “If you purchased and installed a new showerhead in the last ten years, it will be a 2.5 gpm [gallons-per-minute] model, since all showerheads sold in California were low consumption models beginning in 1992.”

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And it is not just crazy California. The Federal Energy Policy Act of 1992 mandates that “all faucet fixtures manufactured in the United States restrict maximum water flow at or below 2.5 gallons per minute (gpm) at 80 pounds per square inch (psi) of water pressure or 2.2 gpm at 60 psi.”

Or as the Department of Energy itself declares to all consumers and manufacturers: “Federal regulations mandate that new showerhead flow rates can’t exceed more than 2.5 gallons per minute (gpm) at a water pressure of 80 pounds per square inch (psi).”

As with all regulations, the restriction on how much water can pour over you at once while standing in a shower is ultimately enforced at the point of a gun. Manufacturers must adhere to these regulations under penalty of law, and to be on the safe side and



adjust for high-water pressure systems, they typically undershoot. If you try your showers right now, you will probably find that they dispense water at two gallons per minute or even less. Together with other regulations concerning water pressure, your shower could fall to as low as 1.5 gallons per minute!

A rotten shower creates a rather serious problem for nearly everyone in the country. In the post-war period, Americans fell in love with luxurious showers, just because we could. A long shower with a blasting spray is a sign of prosperity, individualism, and good health. Popular lore holds that Americans are some of the most showered people in the world. If so, part of the reason is that we had great showerheads.

Clearly the regulators, who regard it as their job to crush luxury and convenience whenever possible, wanted to put a stop to this. That's the reason for the flow restrictors. Forget all that talk about saving water: these restrictions have a negligible effect on overall water use. In any case, whether we use more or less water should be governed by market forces.

To be sure, some companies have tried to get around the regulations by making models with multiple showerheads. This worked for a while because the regulations, if read literally, only regulate the amount of water on a per-shower-head basis. But the companies that make double- and triple-headed models have also faced investigation and harassment.

But then what can the government do about the length of showers? After all, there is no real way to regulate how much water we use and pay for. Maybe the shower heads have to have timers on them. And maybe the feds need to put up little monitors in our showers to make sure that we have stopped and started them.

You might say that water needs to be conserved. Yes, and so does every other scarce good. The peaceful way to do this is through the price system. But because municipal water systems have created artificial shortages, other means become necessary. One regulation piles on top of another, and the next thing you know, you have shower commissars telling you what you can or cannot do in the most private spaces.

And also consider this. According to the government's own water usage statistic, domestic use constitutes only 1 percent of the total, and that includes all the water we use on our lawns. In other words, whether we use a lot or a little bit of water in our showers means absolutely nothing as regards our nation's consumption of water. Why are they doing this to us then? Just to spread that sense of obedience and misery, I suppose. But has central planning ever been more ridiculous, intrusive, and self-defeating?

Most manufacturers adhere to the regulations, and the government has pushed them to make their products ever more useless. But savvy consumers know how to get around the problem. Many people now hack their showers—or customize them, if you prefer. You can take your shower head down, pull the washer out with a screwdriver, and remove the offending intrusion that is restricting water flow. It can be a tiny second washer or it can be a hard plastic piece. Just pop it out and replace the washer. Sometimes it is necessary to trim it out using a pen knife. I've even used a drill.



Using such strategies, you can increase your water flow from two gallons per minute to three and even four gallons per minute. You can easily clock this using a stopwatch and a milk carton. Using this method, I was easily able to expand my gallons per minute on each shower in my house to an average of 3.4 gpm, thereby recreating that childhood sense of gushes of water pouring down.



2. CRANK UP YOUR WATER PRESSURE

The water pressure issue in a home is a major factor in how your faucets, showers, and toilets work. Low pressure causes sediment to build up in the pipes. It causes clogs. It causes breakages. All our sewage systems are designed for massive quantities of water to rush through on a constant basis, and so it should be. What is the prime example of the high civilization of ancient Rome? Its aqueducts that rushed water from place to place, making sure that people could bathe and wash and live a decent life.

In the last twenty years, regulators have been using secretive strategies to reduce the water pressure in our homes. Once there were no regulators on our systems at all. Now they are mandatory. No house in the country can be legally built without them. Today, 50 and 70 pounds per square inch (psi) are considered normal pressures

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for residential uses. However, when the manufacturer ships the item, regulators mandate that they are preset at 45 to 55 psi. In other words, they must be adjusted from their default setting.

How often does this happen? During the housing boom, contractors were building them so fast that homes often retained that low setting. The results can be an amazing annoyance but most people don't know the source. They blame the faucet, the washing machine, the water dispenser on the fridge, but the real problem is not inside the house. It is outside at the water meter under the iron grate.

Why does this even matter? Your pipes are made to be continually flushed out and effectively washed. Waste needs to move through the system. This prevents bad smells from building up. Also, faucets need fast moving water to prevent the buildup of lyme and other deposits. All fixtures need this constant activity to continue to function properly. Slow down the pressure and you will find your fixtures clogging, your toilet breaking, your washing machine eventually ruined, and all your faucets someday nonfunctioning. In some ways, this might be the biggest single change you can make.

Whether you do it yourself or have someone else do it, it should be turned up to at least 75 to 85 pounds per second . A setting of 100 is standard for how high it can go. You will be warned that this is too high and that this can damage your plumbing. Plumbers I've talked to in private say that this is bunk. It takes pressure of 150 or higher to actually bring about problems. Nonetheless, 80 is probably plenty, but think of it: the valves are shipped and installed at half the proper pressure.

It's up to you to change it. Now, to be sure, some people are rather alarmed to discover what is under that grate outside that manages house water pressure. It can be full of bugs and weeds and standing water. Blech. There is a solution. Next time a plumber comes over to the house, just politely ask him to take care of the problem of low water pressure.

Now, this request will initially alarm him. The guild knows its regulations and all plumbers worry that they will get in trouble for unauthorized changes in your system. But the truth is that there is nothing to prevent them from making this adjustment, and most will agree after warning against it. To change it requires only a turn of a small screw on a single pipe. Clockwise will increase your pressure and counterclockwise will reduce your pressure.

This video presents how you can do it yourself if you are careful. You will need your own meter and some tools. For my part, I find it much easier to ask a plumber, thereby reducing risk and frustration.





Go back inside the house and be amazed at the difference. The spray on the faucet will be better, and probably it will begin to cough up some buildup. The same effect will present itself in every area of the house.

This can even make the house smell fresher. It's a small change that will make domestic life vastly more livable. It's not illegal, but I wouldn't go out of my way to tell the regulators what you are doing.

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3. CRANK UP YOUR WATER HEATER

You may have had a sense lately that something is just not right in your domestic life, not calamitously bad but just bad enough to be annoying on a daily basis and in seemingly unpredictable ways. You are not alone. In fact, a huge variety of personal and social problems trace to a single source.

First an inventory to establish what I mean:

- **You have the vague sense that your bed linens are not so much comforting you as hemming you in, restricting you, and just not breathing as they should.**
- **To clean your bathtub and kitchen sink requires an inordinate amount of cleanser and bleach.**
- **Whereas you remember showers that once refreshed you, they now leave you only feeling wet.**
- **It should be pleasure to put on a bright white crisp undershirt, but instead it seems rather routine, dull, even uneventful.**
- **The mop has the dusky smell of an old rag and you keep having to replace it to get rid of the reappearing and never disappearing stink.**
- **Your dinner tonight reminds you of your dinner last night and the night before, and the flavors seem to be piling up into one big haze.**

These are just six of the many dozens of typical symptoms of one of the most common household problems in America today. What is that problem? The simplicity of part of the answer might shock you: your water heater is set at too low a temperature.

Most people don't want to think about their water heaters. It is a subject we would rather avoid. It just sort of sits there like a steel totem-pole in a dusty closet that is otherwise not used for much



because there is not room for much else. The heater itself seems intimidating, plastered with strange insulating devices and warning stickers. It is something to be touched only by specialists. We even fear cleaning behind it, worrying that we will be zapped or scorched.

Sure, we know people who have had to “replace their water heaters” because their “water heater went out,” but because this has never happened to us, we don’t worry about it. Besides, what if it turns out that the water heater has some sort of scary blue flame and a clicking starter or something? Better to leave it alone so that it doesn’t become volcanic.

All of these impulses are wrong. The water heater can be your friend. It can be your greatest friend in your struggle to create and maintain a happy domestic environment. It wants to be useful. There is nothing to be frightened of. There are no blue flames (they are mostly electric now). A water heater is made to heat and hold water. It is begging you to do something that will change your life from grey to bright white: turn up the temperature!

Chances are that your water temperature is set between 110–120 degrees. This is the preferred temperature of the regulators. Water heaters are shipped this way and installed this way. The regulations on new home construction mandate it to be this way. Who thinks to change it?

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Everything adjusts to 118 degrees: germs, viruses, bacteria, dirt, smudge, sludge, stink, dust, and every other damnable thing in the world.

But 120 degrees? Come on. By the time the water leaves the heater and travels through the pipes and hits the air before landing wherever it is supposed to land, chances are that it will fall to 118 degrees. In the dead of winter, with pipes running under the house, it can be even lower.

Think about this: 118 degrees is the temperature at which yeast thrives. It is the temperature for proofing. What does that tell you? It tells you that things can grow at 118 degrees.

In other words, this is too cool! To know what 118 degrees feels like, imagine a bowl of water that you stick your hand in. It is warm, even quite warm, but you don’t really have the drive to pull your hand out to keep yourself safe. You can adjust. You know what? Everything adjusts to 118 degrees: germs, viruses, bacteria, dirt, smudge, sludge, stink, dust, and every other damnable thing in the world. All of this lives, even thrives, at 118 degrees.

Revelation 3:16 has it right: “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.”



Who came up with the idea that the standard temperature should be 120 degrees? The usual bunch: governments that want to impose a variety of deprivations on you, anti-energy people who think the less technological consumption the better, environmentalists who want to stamp out all things bright and beautiful, litigious lawyers who have intimidated heater makers, and safety freaks of all sorts.

Some of these people can be extreme. They say we should eat our own garbage, invite bats to live in our attics, and refrain from killing mosquitoes in the marsh. They are the ones who gave us toilets that don't flush and showerheads that don't spray. They seem to think we should all go around dirty and dissatisfied, and that anything resembling clean, neat, and, well, civilized has to be stamped out.

These people are always worrying about the risks of life, but what about the health risks of living in squalor of their creation?

Here is how you can defy them all in one fell swoop. Turn your temperature up to 130 degrees. How hot is this? Contrary to the claims, it will not scald you. Imagine again a bowl full of water. Put your hand into this temperature and you will say: "Yikes!" or "Ouch!" or "Yeow!" and pull it right out and shake your hand in the air. However, it leaves nothing red, no burns, nothing awful. It is just what used to be called hot water before the lukewarm crowd changed everything.

How does yeast respond to 130 degrees? It dies. Bread bakers know this. You know what else dies? All the icky things mentioned above. They all die mercifully quick deaths at this temperature. Clean clothes! Clean sinks! Satisfyingly hot showers! Comfortable sheets! Clean-smelling mops! Plates that come out of the dishwasher without dinner buildup on them! All of this awaits your act of defiance.

A brief note on shoes. Have you ever bought a new pair because your old ones ... stank? Of course they did. Your socks are not getting clean. They infect your shoes. Oh sure, try to keep it at bay with Dr. Scholl's. It won't work. A shoe stink sticks forever. You thought you had a physical disability, an embarrassing foot odor problem. Nope. It's your hot water heater.

How to fix all of this? It will take less than a minute. If your temperature dial is in the open, good for you. Turn it to 130 degrees or higher. There is a reason these tanks go up to 170 degrees. I read a manual for a dishwasher that says it wants water of 145 degrees. When I was in the dish-washing business, you had to use heavy rubber gloves just to get near water. So be it.

If your dial is covered, ignore all stickers and scary warnings about scalded babies. Take off the steel plate that covers up the setting. Remove the Styrofoam. There you will find a tiny little dial. Use a dime or a screwdriver and give the dial a teeny tiny little turn over to 130 degrees.

Within a day, you will experience the greatest increase in your standard of living since your gas grill and automated sprinkler system.



Your new life begins with a comfortable and happy sleep, a blasting hot and refreshing shower, a crisp T-shirt and clean socks, followed by breakfast on a plate so clean it squeaks.

The benefits will start within hours. Within a day, you will experience the greatest increase in your standard of living since your gas grill and automated sprinkler system.

Your new life begins with a comfortable and happy sleep, a blasting hot and refreshing shower, a crisp T-shirt and clean socks, followed by breakfast on a plate so clean it squeaks. Even cleaning up breakfast will be pure pleasure: the sink gleams, the floor has never been cleaner, and your mop will end up as fresh as the day you bought it.

Indeed, with a water heater set at 130 degrees, all is right with the world—at least that part of it that you can control. Even if the whole world is conspiring against civilization, you can preserve your part of it with the smallest turn of a screwdriver.

4. ADD TSP TO YOUR LAUNDRY SOAP

I'm old enough to have a vague memory of clothes so white that they were called bright. This happened despite the absence of additives—the ridiculous varieties of sprays and bottles and packets that festoon our cabinets today and that we throw into the wash to try to boost the cleaning power of our pathetic machines and increasingly useless laundry soap. If this stuff is so wonderful, why isn't the detergent made from it?

Then I experienced an amazing blast from the past. I added a quarter cup of trisodium phosphate (TSP) and otherwise “treated” nothing. The results were nothing short of mind-boggling. Everything was clean—clean in a way that I recall from childhood.

Next came my confrontation with the local dry cleaner, which I've used for years. I explained what happened and how puzzling it is that by using TSP I was able to clean my clothes more thoroughly and perfectly than his commercial service.

He was not shocked. He completely agreed, though sheepishly.

I pointed out that TSP, which is a natural element discovered in the 16th century, is amazing not because it cleans—it needs soap to do its thing—but rather because it rinses, whooshing away all dirt, oil, stains, as well as all leftover detergent. Bleach whitens but it ruins fabrics, and that's not good. What is needed is a good rinsing agent that leaves clothes not only perfectly clean but also smelling fantastic. TSP does it, and that's why it has long been an essential ingredient in laundry soap.

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Once again, he agreed.

Does he use it? No. And why not?

It is not “commercially viable,” he said.

How can this be? It is not expensive. It is freely available at the hardware store in the paint section. If something works, the laundry service pleases its customers more. That means more business and higher profits. Isn't the goal to clean clothes well and do a good job for customers?

Yes, true, he said, but, again, TSP is not “commercially viable.” He politely referred all further questions to the Dry Cleaning and Laundry Institute, whose website provides no information at all to nonmembers. However, the Laundry Institute did answer my email. It admitted that trisodium phosphate produces cleaner laundry.

Bingo. Cleaner laundry. Cleaner than what? Anything else. Not “commercially viable” means that governments will no longer permit laundries to clean your shirts. You can add TSP at home—government hasn't restricted that yet—but commercial houses cannot. However, the Laundry Institute did say that “there are other ways to achieve a clean shirt.” What are they? He didn't say. He said: “You will have to do some legwork to find a cleaner that meets your needs.”

My needs? My needs are for clean clothes, same as the laundry needs of the whole of humanity since the beginning of time. The whole purpose of laundries is to meet that need.

Here's the problem, however. The goal of the regulators who regulate the laundry is not to improve your life. It is to wreck your life a bit at a time by pressing increasing numbers of restrictions and mandates upon private producers.

One of these mandates has removed TSP from detergent—and with catastrophic results. No one wants to talk about this. There is a major hush-hush culture here because business, understandably, doesn't want to face a consumer backlash, and government doesn't want to acquire the reputation for being the civilization wrecker that it truly is.

These kinds of regulations are capable of driving an entire industry into the ground, as people with the intense desire for clean clothes—the very people who are willing to pay for laundry services—increasingly resort to home cleaning and ironing. An entire step in the structure of production is eliminated, as laundry autarky replaces the division of labor, which is the driving force of cooperative human effort.

It's no wonder that the industry wants no talk of this problem. It's very *raison d'être* is under attack. If laundries can't clean clothes, they have to shut down.

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Does government care? If you read between the lines in the almost-candid moments of government statements, you can see what is going on here. In 2009, Clive Davies, a product engineer with the EPA, granted an interview with the New York Times that focused on home products. You might wonder what a product engineer is doing working for the government rather than the private sector. This interview shows why. Every one of the questions he is asked concerned the effect of home products on the environment. Not even one actually probed the essential question of whether the products actually work.

Mr. Davies's job is to decide whether to affix a supposedly valued designation to products: Designed for the Environment. It's pretty clear that anything that actually cleans, washes, or scrubs probably can't earn the designation. An empty box that claims to be detergent stands a better chance of gaining the government seal of approval than a detergent that actually works.

Then we get to the end of the interview, in which he is actually candid about the goal: the elimination of detergents (meaning the elimination of clean). Davies concedes that this would be the best possible result. And what does he recommend instead? Vinegar and "elbow grease"—the old-fashioned phrase for "scrub harder."

Thus spake the government. That's the future as these bureaucrats see it. It's a future of elbow grease, meaning manual labor unassisted by any products of free enterprise like machines and detergents that work.

That's the future as these bureaucrats see it. It's a future of elbow grease.

disease, and deprivation.

The main issue here is that Americans (Europeans too) are having their living standards systematically degraded by regulators who apparently hate our modern conveniences like washing machines and want to drive us ever more into an impoverished state of nature.

And don't tell me that phosphate-free dish soap works just as well. It's a laughable claim. If you buy some phosphate and add a tablespoon to the load, you enter a new world once the washer is finished. Things are actually clean like you might remember from childhood.

An empty box that claims to be detergent stands a better chance of gaining the government seal of approval than a detergent that actually works.

It's a future in which our clothes are dirty, we have no soap that works to wash our bodies, our dishes are full of gritty film, our floors are grungy, our windows are smudgy, everything more or less stinks like vinegar, our toilets don't work, our trash is hurled in a pile out back, and vast amounts of our time are spent scrubbing things instead of reading, singing, writing, or conversing. It is a future just like the long-ago past, complete with wash tubs, wash boards, and outhouses—along with their attendant dirt,



The sales of new home appliances have soared over the last five years, according to industry reports. The data are not broken down by type, but I'm willing to bet that quite a few washing machines have been sold to unsuspecting customers who had no idea that the real problem was with the detergents, not the machines. Hardly anyone I have spoken to has understood this problem, but all confirmed the fact that their clothes are not getting clean.

The ban on TSP in laundry soap that took place in the early 1990s, apparently codified in a 1993 law. The idea, or the excuse, was to stop the increased growth of algae in rivers and lakes (phosphate is a fertilizer too), even though there are other ways to filter phosphate, home use contributes virtually nothing to the alleged problem, and there is no solid evidence that plant growth in rivers and lakes is a harm at all.

In any case, consumers gradually noticed that stains were becoming more stubborn than ever, and thus did a huge new range of products start appearing on the market. These products permit you to treat your clothes before you wash them. Today our cabinets are filled with such products—spray and wash, bleach pens, stain removers, boosters of all sorts—and we use them by the gallon.

Does anyone stop and wonder why such products are necessary in the first place, and, if they are so good, why aren't they in the detergent so that the whole of the load gets clean and not just the treated part? The reason, most fundamentally, is that the formula for detergent was changed as a result of government regulation.

The difference wasn't obvious at first. But as time has gone on, other changes began to take place, like the mandates for machines that use less water with "top loading" models, along with mandates for tepid temperatures of water in our homes. In the end, the result is dramatic. It all amounts to dirty, yellowing clothes.

This is the exact opposite of what we expect in markets, in which products are ever better and cheaper due to innovation, expansion of the division of labor, and competition. But with government regulation, the results are deliberately the opposite. We pay ever-higher prices for shoddy results.

Do we see what is happening here? I can detect very little in the way of public knowledge, much less outcry. In the old Cold War days, I recall wondering how it was that the Soviet people could have put up with state-caused impoverishment for decade after decade, and wondering why people didn't just rise up and overthrow their impoverishers. Now I'm beginning to see why. If this all happens slowly and quietly, there is no point at which the reality of cause and effect dawns on people.

Consumers gradually noticed that stains were becoming more stubborn than ever, and thus did a huge new range of products start appearing on the market.



One final note on my conversation with my dry cleaner. He gave me the heads up that the main ingredient used for dry cleaning, perchloroethylene, is not long for this world. California and New York are considering bans, and the rest of the country comes later. After that, it's all over, and the last one to leave civilization will have to remember to shut off the fluorescent light.

This is the whole trajectory of life under government control. They are the predators; we are their prey. And this isn't just about clean clothes. It applies to every regulation, every tax, every expenditure, every stupid war, and every monetary manipulation. Everything government does comes at our expense, and the costs are both seen and unseen.

A quarter cup of real TSP (don't buy the fake thing) combined with your usual laundry soap will yield wonderfully clean clothes, provided you were suckered into buying one of the government-approved front-loading models of machines. Clean clothes require 1) lots of water, 2) lots of heat, and 3) detergent with phosphates. Then you can throw all those other silly products in the trash. The bleach, which absolutely wrecks cotton, can go too. Thanks to the government, you can only find TSP in the paint section of the hardware store.

The product is also useful for your dishes. The whole problem began in 2011. Dishes used to come out of the dishwasher hot, beautiful, dry, and clear as a bell. I never thought much about it. The dishwasher worked. You put them in and they came out clean.

One day that started to change. My first thought was, well, I guess I have the wrong washer and this one is old. So I bought another one. Presuming that a new one would surely be fine, I didn't pay much attention, but after a few weeks, I noted the same issue. The dishes were coming out with dusty rings on them and strange particles. I was having to rewash them. As I noted over the coming days, the new washer was even worse than the old one.

I was kicking myself for not having checked Consumer Reports before buying, but then I remembered my experience with clothes. Surely it could not be the case that the same ridiculous problem is present in the detergent I use for dishwashers. Surely not!

In this case, I could find no evidence of any regulation that required soap companies to take out their phosphates. But as I went through the aisle at the store, there I saw it in tiny print, again and again: no phosphates. A bit more looking and the answer became obvious. It turns out that the soap companies had been threatened with a push to eliminate phosphates. This would have destroyed their entire product.

So rather than face that regulatory regime—inflexible and violent—they all agreed to remove them on their own volition. Why? Because removing them from consumer products would allow them to retain them for commercial products. As a result, right now, consumers can only

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buy inferior detergent. But if you are a company or restaurant you have special access to brands that do contain phosphates.

It's been different for millions of others. People just do not know. So they spend money on new machines. They buy ever more detergents. They curse free enterprise for giving them bad products. Or they just adjust and downgrade their living standards. Instead of using a dishwasher, they hand wash their dishes, wasting time and engaging in unseemly tasks that economic development is supposed to eliminate.

Once again, the regulator is hidden here. There is no ban in place on phosphates for dish-washing soap. But the companies who make this soap have learned how to anticipate regulations even before they are in place. They decided to degrade their product before the government, with great public attention, forced them into it. But there we have the power of government today. It can destroy civilization through threats alone.

TSP once again comes to the rescue. Add a tablespoon to the dishwasher, and, like magic, the good old days come back. It will happen immediately. You will never have trouble again.

Companies who make this soap have learned how to anticipate regulations even before they are in place.

5. STOCK UP ON SOON-TO-BE-BANNED PRODUCTS

Ah, spring, the time when the landscape appears as if it were painted by a great artist, when the birds make music of symphonic quality, and when the very air we breathe feels air conditioned. That last point is particularly important, because it is only true so long as we are outside.

If we are inside, it is a different matter altogether.

Most of the year, indoor air is fabulously fresh, clean, and circulating at the right temperature, thanks to the greatest source for clean, wonderful air: not the Clean Air Act but central air conditioning and heating. When people say, hey, turn on the air, it is literally true. We hardly open windows anymore, which (not being Mr. Outdoors) I think is fine in principle.

But in the spring, the air goes off. It is no longer cold enough for heat but it is not yet warm enough outside for the air conditioner. The thermostat tells the machine to stay put. You could turn on just the blower, but who thinks of doing that? So the air just sort of sits there, dormant and still. It is the right temperature, but it is not moving.

You might not notice this at first. But once you focus on it, you suddenly realize: I'm suffocating! This is precisely the revelation that hit me two nights ago. For two weeks, nights had been oddly miserable. I wasn't too hot or too cold, just oddly and unidentifiably uncomfortable. I



would wake somehow unrested. Am I sick? Am I getting old? Finally it hit me. The only circulation in this room comes from human breath!

This room needs a fan running. On it came, and with it, life itself. The night was suddenly glorious, clean, and happy. All dreams were dreamy. I awoke and there was once again music in the air, the feel of flowers, the sound of birds (metaphorically of course). The fan had brought the spring indoors.

This room needs a fan running. On it came, and with it, life itself.

Then I began to notice something. This problem isn't limited to the bedroom. It afflicts virtually all indoor space. In the spring, with neither heater nor air conditioner, indoor air begins to sink into a stultifying blechiness. If you are sitting in the same spot, you are breathing the same air again and again.

My office needed a fan too! I turned it on to the same effect: the flowers appeared, the birds sang, the air moved! Suddenly my day has become as glorious as my night, filled with rapturous, spring-like freshness. The fan! God bless it.

In any case, we might as well get used to fans because government regulations over the last decades are trying to wreck our air conditioners and central heating units. If you have had one break in the last few years, you know this. Or maybe you know the outrageous expense, but not the reason government regulations on refrigerants and power efficiency have caused the cost of air conditioning to soar. It can cost up to ten times what it did ten years ago.

Curious as I am about these matters, I ask every air-conditioning expert I know about this subject. They all confirm it. While the costs of things tend to go down in a real free-market economy, the opposite has been true in air conditioning. Repairs will normally cost \$500 plus. New units can be \$2,000–\$5,000. Nor do they last as long as they once did.

Manufacturers are permitted to make units that use only so much electrical power. They must choose among the features in which to allocate this energy ceiling. The lighter, “more efficient” parts tend to break more easily than they once did. This means that you have to replace the units more often than you did in the past. In addition, the federal regulations have attempted to ban the form of freon used in most all air conditioners, and companies will try to pressure you to buy a new unit. Don't give in. The old coolant is still legal, if discouraged.

By the way, it is the same with refrigerators. Manufacturers have to choose among features and are forced to make products that are less robust than they once were. This means that we must use them less in order to get value from the products. With refrigeration, this is extremely difficult. But with air conditioning, there are some options. You can use a fan to drastically reduce the burden on your units.

Let's just say that the manufacturers went along with all the new regulations in hopes of actually selling more units over time. I've not done the research to prove this but it wouldn't surprise me. One way out is to secede from this round-robin approach of buy and replace, buy and replace. This



simple solution will add years to your units. And you can have the satisfaction of knowing that in the smallest way, you have helped subvert the racket of the industrial-regulatory complex.

Let's return to the issue of water in the house. The scene is quite dreadful. The water pressure is low so that pipes don't clean well. The tank is undersized so that the flush doesn't work well and the toilet gets and stays dirty. The inside parts of the tank break easily because they are not moving fast or well because there is too little water going through the tank. The same is true of the shower and the sink. Everything is economized so that the pipes don't get the workout they need to stay functioning cleanly.

What is the result? Far more shower, toilet, and sink clogs than you can remember from ten or twenty years ago. You know this too. Think about all the hotel showers and sinks that you have seen that are completely clogged. It is really disgusting. You have the shower running for two minutes and then find that you are standing in a pool of water. You brush your teeth only to find a swamp mess in the sink. This is common, even in the nicest hotels. It all traces to the many ways in which government has degraded our plumbing.

It happens in your own home. So you go to the hardware store. You know from experience that liquid drain openers do not work so well. You recall that powders work better. Best of all is old fashioned lye. It gets hot as can be and destroys nearly every clog you can possibly make. You have to be careful with it because it can seriously harm your skin but, hey, we are adults here.

But three years ago, I began to notice something odd. The grocery store stopped carrying it. Then one hardware store stopped carrying it. Then every big-box store removed it from the shelves completely. I searched and searched the Internet to find out some reason. I figured that there had to be some regulation, but I found nothing. Finally I asked the purchasing manager at the hardware store what happened to the lye. The answer surprised me. Apparently it was all removed after some news reports that lye was being used in some illegal drug-making process.

Given all the publicity and regulations that had followed other cases like this, the stores stopped carrying it to protect themselves from liability, to avoid bad publicity, and to forestall the inevitable ban that would happen in the wake of such publicity. This was once again a case where the commercial sector responded to the mere prospect of a threat of regulation.

Fortunately, there is still time left to buy lye online. That window might not last for much longer. For now it is there, and it has never been more necessary. A few cans of this stuff will last many years, and save you money on worthless products sold in the grocery store. You can easily buy lye on Amazon—for now. It's the only drain opener that actually works. Forget all the useless liquids at the local store. None of them work.

Let's now move to the backyard. When I was a kid, you could know an insecticide by its smell. It

One way out is to secede from this round-robin approach of buy and replace, buy and replace. This simple solution will add years to your units.



had that certain scent that projected a message: all nasty bug things will die forever when faced with this potent poison. There is comfort in the smell. Bugs and insects are nasty. They are dangerous. They once wiped out one-third of Europe's population in successive rounds of the black death. Even in the 19th-century American South, insects caused terrible diseases called yellow fever. Today in Africa, they still kill millions.

Insects are the only things on this planet that have killed more humans than governments have killed. We dare not treat this subject lightly. And yet nearly all the information we receive today from the regulators and environmentalists speak nothing about the benefits of pesticides. They talk only in the broadest terms about the danger they represent to "insects, animals, and/or humans." Note the weasel term here "and/or." Of course they represent a danger to insects! That's the whole idea.

That we can even talk about banning pesticides is a testament to their success. Mankind has been menaced by pests for all of human history. It is rather ridiculous to imagine that we are menaced by chemicals that took away one the deadliest of killers. But such is the way politics works.

Our tendency to underestimate the dangers of nature while overestimating the dangers of chemicals stem from several factors. An increasingly urban population thinks that "nature" is more like a pretty public park than the disease-ridden swamp that our ancestors feared. The ideology of "back to nature" is spreading due to environmentalist mania. Now that the pesticides have worked to eradicate disease and massively increase crop yields, people imagine that they can be banned without cost.

Partly due to lobbying pressure, the list of banned pesticides is growing. The movement began in the 1970s and has grown exponentially. Most of the bans in existence were enacted in the 2000s and industry and consumers face ever-fewer options today. Even when the West Nile virus struck the United States in 1999, there was a crazy outcry about the notion that we might actually do something to eradicate the mosquito population. How many people have to die before people figure out that stopping the development of bug-eradicating chemicals might be a bad idea?

So that we consider the plus side of chemicals, hear B. Lomborg in *The Skeptical Environmentalist* (Cambridge University Press, 2001):

If pesticides were abolished, the lives saved would be outnumbered by a factor of around 1,000 by the lives lost due to poorer diets. Secondary penalties would be massive environmental damage due to the land needs of less productive farming, and a financial cost of around 20 billion US dollars.

As true as this statement is, it comes nowhere close to expressing the full reality of the situation. But this isn't about trying to get you to love or use pesticides. Most of us have contracts with bug

An increasingly urban population thinks that "nature" is more like a pretty public park than the disease-ridden swamp that our ancestors feared.



spraying companies that treat our homes with chemicals far stronger than we could get at the hardware store.

But let's say that we really do have a bug problem, really are dealing with serious issues just outside the door and want to actually get rid of the problem. There are ever-fewer options. Even the legal chemicals are not carried in hardware stores as they once were.

This is true of the most widely used pesticide in the United States, Malathion. This was the chemical that brought West Nile under control. It is useful against many forms of pests and it is a major reason for how farmers keep the fruit fly under control. I use it in my home. I'm not a chemist or expert in this area but I can tell you this much: it has the same smell from childhood that just says, this stuff kills bugs.

So if you want to use this chemical at home, you are not likely to find it. However, many people don't know that it is actually widely available online. You can find it from many dealers online at Amazon for very cheap. How long will this be true? It is hard to say. The push to ban it is well organized even though there is not a shred of evidence that it harms people.

If this goes the way of other chemical pesticides, it could be banned nearly overnight. At that point, prices will skyrocket and you won't be able to find any. You will be unable to control a mosquito invasion or some other problem we do not yet know about. The time to stock up, then, is now. Getting pesticides before they're banned is not something that the rice-and-beans survivalists think much about. The truth is that under the right conditions, a good pesticide is all that stands between your family and grave illness and even death.

Moving on to soap, I've seen various notices that antibacterial soaps are also on the list of proposed bans. The crowd of lobbyists that essentially hates all of modern life has this notion that they really make our hands too clean, that they cause bugs and bacteria to grow resistant (hev. this is a race that mankind can and must win!), and that there is really nothing wrong with the smell of human sweat and fungus.

As for the rest of us, give us the freedom to use antibacterial soap. How much longer will it be around? It is hard to say. Maybe the campaign will fail and the threat will go away. If this follows the trend, we will wake one day to find that this product has vanished from the shelves. I'm betting on the latter.

Let us finally address the great light bulb controversy. I've come to loathe fluorescent lighting. Maybe you agree. Maybe you disagree. The point is that in a free society, people should have choice, and it is incredibly obvious that consumers want the freedom to buy incandescent light bulbs. This is what governments all over the world are working to destroy.

There is fascinating symbolic meaning to this. The light bulb

The night lit up.
An innovation of
mankind finally
conquered
darkness. Those
who resent
progress and hate
human happiness
have never quite
gotten over it.



was one of those hinge-of-history innovations that changed everything. The night lit up. An innovation of mankind finally conquered darkness. Those who resent progress and hate human happiness have never quite gotten over it.

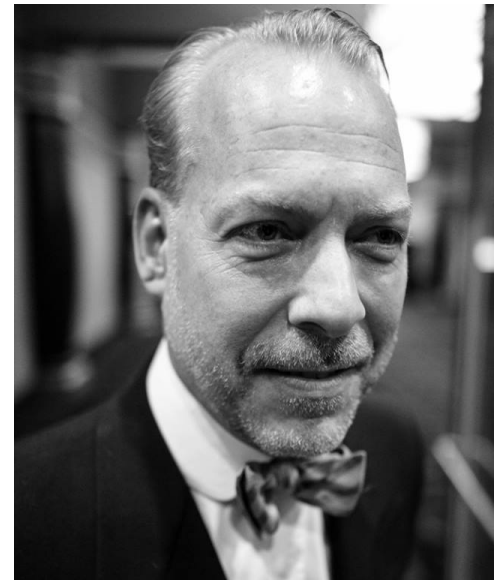
Every time I go to the hardware store these days, the shelves are short on incandescent bulbs. Clearly consumers are stockpiling them, and rightly so. Liberal commentators make fun of these habits, claiming that there is no pending ban and that this is really some kind of paranoia at work.

The truth is that the ban has been on and off again for many years now, with the legislative and regulatory pressure going decidedly in the direction of banning them all. Now is the time to stock up on necessary drugs, soap, and light bulbs. This is not to prepare for natural disaster or economic collapse. This is to anticipate the unnatural disaster of government bans on products that make our lives better.

CONCLUSION

The government has wrecked many things that can't be fixed. I recently figured out the precise regulations that cause our lawn mowers to stop working properly. Yes, the reason is due to federal regulations. I could fix it myself if I had a machine shop and a blowtorch but I do not. So I live with the results of a deliberately degraded quality of life.

That's a short history of the last several decades. Government is always working to roll back the gains markets have made over the centuries and slowly unravel the resulting civilization, driving us back and back. Fortunately government is doing this more slowly than private markets are building civilization, which is why we continue to see progress all around us. It's a race between them and us. How long can we keep outrunning them? I don't know, but insofar as we are able, we must keep trying.



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