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Press Here for Productivity

MEET AMAZON'S LATEST DASH BUTTON

By now, you've probably heard of Amazon Dash — the lineup of buttons you can press to replenish your stock of soap, toilet paper, dog food, etc. You may even have a few scattered around the house. The buttons make ordering your most often used household products as easy as, well, pressing a button.

Today, Amazon.com sells over 100 of these buttons, each representing a different brand, from OxiClean to Red Bull. This past May, however, Amazon went in a slightly different direction with its newest member of the Dash family. The company revealed the AWS IoT Dash Button, a one-touch device built for use with Amazon Web Services and the Internet of Things — known as IoT, the cloud infrastructure run by the web giant.

According to Amazon, the AWS Dash Button is a simple Wi-Fi device that's easy to configure and is designed for developers to get started with AWS IoT, AWS Lambda, Amazon



DynamoDB, Amazon SNS, and many other Amazon Web Services without having to write device-specific code.

In other words, you can basically use the button to perform any number of

productivity-based tasks. Instead of ordering a product — which you can still do if you choose — you can set the button to call a specific person, or send a message via email, social media, or text. You can track products, start and stop tasks — you name it. It's yours to do with as you please. Amazon says the device can integrate with third-party APIs like Twitter, Facebook, and even your own company's applications.

Amazon claims it was designed for anyone and that it's easy to use. If you have programming experience, great. If you don't, that's okay, too. Amazon provides step-by-step instructions to get you started.

Like the first Dash Buttons, the AWS button has limited availability. If the product is a success, chances are we'll see more of the button in the future as it reveals its potential as a productivity powerhouse. You can learn more at aws.amazon.com/iot/button.

TO STAY INFORMED AND ON TOP OF THE GAME

Continuing education is very important in my industry. And, successful Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) investigations rely heavily on the latest research and techniques. There is so much new research, and so many new tools and methods, that failing to attend some sort of class, workshop, or conference means that you might be working with obsolete information. And when that happens, your clients can suffer the unfortunate consequences. Consequently, staying informed has been a major goal since I started doing IAQ consulting.



Continuing education is so important that in the early days of my career, I regularly attended a three-day IAQ conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma. At that time, there weren't many places where you could get training or continue to educate yourself on IAQ, so most of the latest research and the biggest names in the industry were there. Over the past 25 years, additional research has been done, major contamination issues have been documented, and the issue of IAQ has moved to the forefront. As a result, today there are many, many resources that IAQ specialists can call on for continuing their education. One group that focuses exclusively on IAQ is the Indoor Air Quality Association (IAQA). Managed by ASHRAE, or the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers, the IAQA holds local Houston workshops (I am the Chapter Director) offers online training events, and even sponsors a national conference. All great education opportunities!

My favorite learning opportunity is an annual program that I attend in Massachusetts during August. It's called the Westford Building Science Symposium. Originally billed as a chance to talk about building failures — and drink beer — the program has developed into one that focuses on the technology and physics of building design, construction, and other critical building issues. I have been attending this three-day program for 15 years now, and see it as the pinnacle of my learning by increasing my knowledge, understanding, and abilities to identify the sources of IAQ problems in all kinds of buildings. The conference, affectionately called Summer Camp, is now North America's top source of specialized education on building construction techniques and failures.

Over the years I have learned that there are a lot of subjects and properties (of materials) that researchers and product manufacturers take for granted, but which architects, engineers, contractors, consultants (like me), and even building owners know little about. Understanding the issues related to the movement of heat, light, and moisture in a building's slab, wall, or roof seems simple ... but it turns out it isn't. A prime example of this involves moisture.

Most people involved with building management have a good understanding of how water gets into buildings. They recognize that water comes in three different forms: liquid, solid, and vapor. Moreover, we all know that we can seal buildings to keep out ice and water. But vapor is the tough one! If the proper construction materials are not selected, or installed in the correct way, you can be letting in water vapor ... and that is often hard to find and fix! And uncontrolled water vapor opens up a building's structure to all kinds of failures.

That's right, I've learned that we often don't consider the vapor contained in the air leaks at windows — or around outlets or switches installed on the perimeter wall — because it can't be seen.



But that air leak also brings in vapor, which can condense on the inside surface of the wall. When that happens, things then start to deteriorate, and you won't often see it until it's too late!

Attending Summer Camp has given me a perspective on construction and building design that I would not have had otherwise. It gives me the opportunity to learn about the latest research and product details, and I get to speak with the experts directly involved. I have even taken advantage of the contacts made at Summer Camp to help me fix a few unusual or unique problems found in the field. And I have found that using the Summer Camp theories in a field environment is unbelievably satisfying!

Sometimes, the Summer Camp presentations are a bit "over my head," but I love the challenge. Each year, I bring the handouts, reference documents, and my own handwritten notes home and scrutinize them. It can take days to understand the concepts, and may be months before I have a chance to use them, but it has been well worth the time invested. The more I understand about material properties, how buildings should be built, and how buildings can fail, the better I can identify the source of the issues occurring and successfully resolve indoor air quality problems.

I like the challenges presented at Summer Camp!

I enjoy hearing about problems and discovering solutions!

I love my job!



How to Train Your TEAM MEMBER

Getting employees trained properly is often easier said than done — especially when you're training an entire team. In fact, offering every employee good training is practically a full-time job in its own right. You want your team to have the hard and soft skills they need to be effective in their roles, but how do you keep up with providing every team member access to learning materials that are the best fit for them?



Use criticism wisely as a means of motivating them and helping them grow, while avoiding bad habits that won't serve them well.

Depending on the size of your business, you may have managers who can track employee training for you. If you have concrete goals in mind for your employees, you'll want to guide the type of training they do. But even if you don't have deliberate objectives in mind for some employees, or you don't have the resources to take charge of everyone's training plan, it's still valuable to hold them accountable with training — and to implement measures to ensure they're on track.

A 2013 survey by educational technology company Skillsoft found 33 percent of office workers prefer training where they actively feel and experience what they're learning about. In your company, that can be accomplished through mentor relationships or a designated expert who can offer hands-on training.

To improve cost efficiency, the best compromise may be to combine lessons and hands-on training. The experiential part of the training could include online classes, relevant books, coursework, or turning company projects into homework for employees to work through.

For measurement and accountability, it's key for employees to check in with their mentor or manager regularly. A weekly or monthly contact session gives both sides a chance to share how they feel the training is going.

In those meetings, as the employer, you'll want to issue equal parts praise and constructive criticism. Be sure to show appreciation — people want to feel like you acknowledge their effort, especially if they're going above and beyond the call of duty. Use criticism wisely as a means of motivating them and helping them grow, while avoiding bad habits that won't serve them well.

Training team members is a crucial part of your company's growth. Fortunately, building a culture of growth and innovation will encourage everyone to strive for improvement, which is exactly what will take your business where you're trying to go.

Reg Hudson:

Real Estate Property Manager



I first met Travis West around 2004, when I was managing a building in Corpus Christi with an apparent mold problem. Wanting to address the potential issue quickly, we brought Travis in to do some tests. He confirmed that we had a fairly significant problem that had to be dealt with right away.

We put up a barrier between the mold and the building employees, quickly working to remove the mold entirely. Communication was very important to us during this time. We wanted employees to be aware of what was happening and know we were doing everything we could to keep them safe during this process. Travis became a big part of helping us do that.

While removing the mold, Travis stayed on as part of the team. He would take regular samples, proving that no mold was getting into the air during the process. Travis even recommended the remodeling company we worked with, and helped us solve the problem quickly and easily.

Since then, I've called Travis on several occasions, dealing with what I like to call indoor air quality false alarms. Every now and then, an occupant will smell something and get the idea in their head that there's a problem. Of course, we want to address all concerns right away, and Travis is my go-to in these cases.

On the times when I've called him, we mandate he do the test and tell us exactly what he finds. He's been helpful on several occasions, presenting clear results and well-written reports that help us prove there's not a problem.

When I bring Travis in to look at a building, I feel like he can really turn that situation around. His expertise can help building occupants feel reassured about the building they are in.

He's a terrific professional. I've had several situations where I needed to bring Travis into a meeting and speak directly with CEOs and other higher-ups. He handles it well and does a wonderful job. Travis is just a great guy to work with.

POISON IN THE WATER

THE DANGERS OF LEAD PIPES AND DRINKING WATER

For many years, lead was used in many readily available materials including paint, gasoline, household plumbing, and municipal water lines — all despite evidence of its dangers being known in the United States as early as 1845.

One of the most dangerous realities of lead poisoning is how hard it is to detect. Even in high levels, symptoms of lead poisoning — vomiting, weight loss, abdominal pain, and fatigue — may not appear until a person is suffering from near-fatal amounts of exposure. But its effects are dangerous and long-lasting.

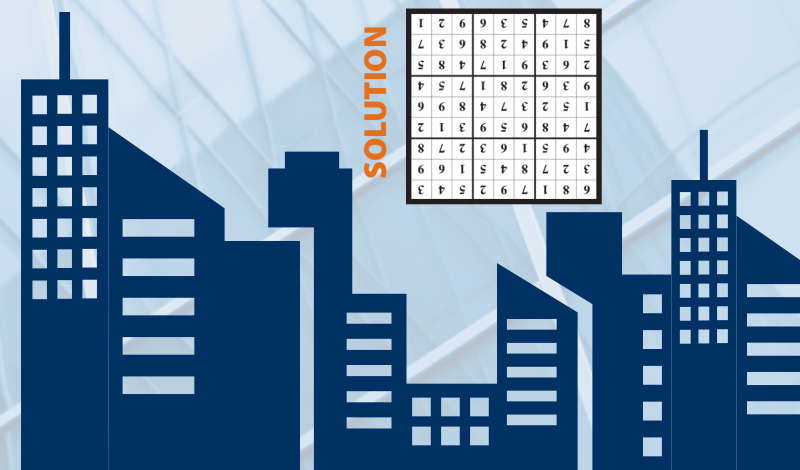
Even in small doses, lead exposure can damage the brain and nervous system, slowing development and leading to hearing, speech, and learning problems. Children, specifically those six and under, are at the greatest risk. Lead exposure can lower a child's IQ, diminishing their ability to pay attention.

The Environmental Protection Agency reports over 20 percent of lead exposure cases are the result of contaminated drinking water. Infants drinking mixed formulas can receive 40 to 60 percent of exposure through the drinking water used in their bottles. It wasn't until the Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1986 went into effect that major steps were taken in protecting people from this danger. Only lead-free pipe, solder, or flux can be used when constructing or repairing plumbing used for public, residential, or commercial buildings. New construction materials were used and countless water pipes were voluntarily replaced by building owners and managers nationwide.

In spite of the Safe Drinking Water Act, recent hazards regarding lead exposed drinking water arose in Flint, Michigan. There is little that anyone — outside of the Flint Water Department — could do. When Flint changed its water source from water treated by Detroit Water and Sewerage Department to the Flint River, city officials had failed to apply corrosion inhibitors. Water from the Flint River corroded aging pipes, releasing lead into the drinking water. It created a public health state of emergency, one that Flint is still struggling to recover from.



Save for such rare incidents, lead exposure is not a major concern for occupants in residential or commercial buildings built after 1986. If you live in a home or work in a building constructed before 1986, it is important to check the quality of your pipes and drinking water. Commercial building owners and managers need to know if their building is at risk and understand the methods to manage that risk. Testing the water at delivery sources can provide that much needed data, and can serve as another layer of due diligence for future tenant concerns.



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