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PLUMBING

I Hear You Knocking

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Scott Milne

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But you can't come in. We've heard that a lot from our customers lately—at least in the first few months of the virus pandemic. We've all been affected by the crisis. Restaurants can't serve food if they can't open their doors and plumbers can't service plumbing in the house if we can't go into the house.

When the pandemic first began to spread my office started to call customers to set up jobs. What we got was a lot of Not Right Now, and I certainly don't blame them. A lot of my technicians were worried about going into people's homes. We only responded to true emergencies—water running, water heaters failing—things that could not be put off.

We shut down for a few weeks and it was tough. Plumbers were deemed to be essential to daily life and we slowly began to take calls. Every customer was asked about the health of their family and relatives. “Has anyone been sick in your home? Do you know anyone who has been sick?” Most of the work in the beginning was only in basements.

We put an advertisement in our local paper and emailed it to our customers that we were available for business and that all our trucks were equipped with face mask, gloves and hand sanitizer. It’s funny, we have always worn gloves for dirty jobs but to wear a mask and gloves for every job is more than we normally do. I don’t consider myself old (although I am) but it wasn’t that long ago that we *never* worked with gloves. I can remember plumbers eating lunch and not even washing their hands. Think about it ... I bet some of you can remember guys just rubbing their hands on their pants and eating a doughnut or a sandwich. I remember when I was an apprentice one of the older time plumbers showing up for work and his hands looked like they hadn’t been washed in a few days. Have you ever thought about why we don’t get more infections than we do? Maybe there is something to be said about building up immunity? I don’t think we can build up immunity to COVID-19, so staying safe is really all we can do.

If anything positive comes out of this crisis, hopefully it will become standard procedure for plumbers to start wearing gloves more often and washing up. We took advantage of a local distillery that started making hand sanitizer. My wife went to the dollar store and bought spray bottles so each one of the trucks has its own bottle of disinfectant. We gave our team a little more protection and helped out a local business—a win/win right ? The hardest part has been getting masks. We’ve ordered more but they can be hard to get.

We are really lucky since our shop is in an industrial park and two bays over is a company that sells... wait for it... rubber gloves! We’ve got plenty of gloves for the crew.

We are in a different world now a day. Mask, gloves, disinfectant, social distancing... it's all part of our everyday life now.

Speaking of everyday life now, I'd like to give thanks to our first responders, doctors, nurses and EMT's for all they do. I think plumbers should be included in that group. Plumbers were designated as essential to the economy and worked right through the early days of the pandemic. Plumbers have gone into homes and bathrooms putting themselves in immediate proximity of customers who may have been infected with the virus. Helping provide sanitary conditions is what we do and have been doing for hundreds of years. The black plague was carried and transmitted by unsanitary conditions.

So hats off and many thanks to all the plumbers out there who continued to do their work and helped keep our world safe from disease and unsanitary conditions. In many situations the country did hear your knocking and were thankful you were there.

Scott Milne is the owner of Milne Plumbing and Heating. He and his company have been serving the greater Boston area for nearly 30 years. He specializes in high-efficiency heating systems for custom homes.

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