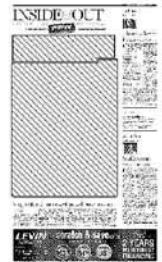


Time to wake up that freezer!

WILLIAM NEFF | THE PLAIN DEALER

With holiday big-meal-cooking season just around the corner, now's the time when a lot of us realize a) how little attention we've paid all year to that stand-alone chest freezer in the basement, b) how much we're going to need it in the next few weeks, and c) how desperately we hope the thing won't choose this moment to conk out or give us any trouble. Well, it's never too late. Let's go have a look.



Place the unit properly and get rid of the other junk.

Like every other freezer or refrigerator unit, your stand-alone freezer works by drawing outside air over its refrigeration coils. So no matter how well you maintain the freezer, it's not going to work best if its airflow is blocked by surrounding clutter.

Plus, **encroaching clutter invites collecting dust.** The freezer's compressor acts as a giant air filter, pulling in outside air and any dirt or dust along with it. If your freezer's not keeping the temperature you've set it to keep, check the cleanliness of the space around it.

Clean those gaskets.

Any household gunk on the unit's door gasket or small damage to the rubber will cause an imperfect seal, running up your power bill and messing with the temperature in your freezer. Clean the gasket periodically and examine it for tears.

Watch that frost buildup.

Even frost-free freezers can sometimes use a manual defrosting, especially if the ice has built up over months of neglect. Unplug the unit and let it defrost on its own. Never attempt to chip ice out with a knife or screwdriver — you'll damage your freezer before you know it.

Don't keep the lid open.

Yes, it seems obvious, but keeping the door open — for example, to rummage around looking for stored items — wastes energy and increases wear and tear on the compressor. Organize your freezer carefully and **create a simple chart or diagram showing where everything is.** Tape that to the freezer lid. When you open it, go in with a purpose.

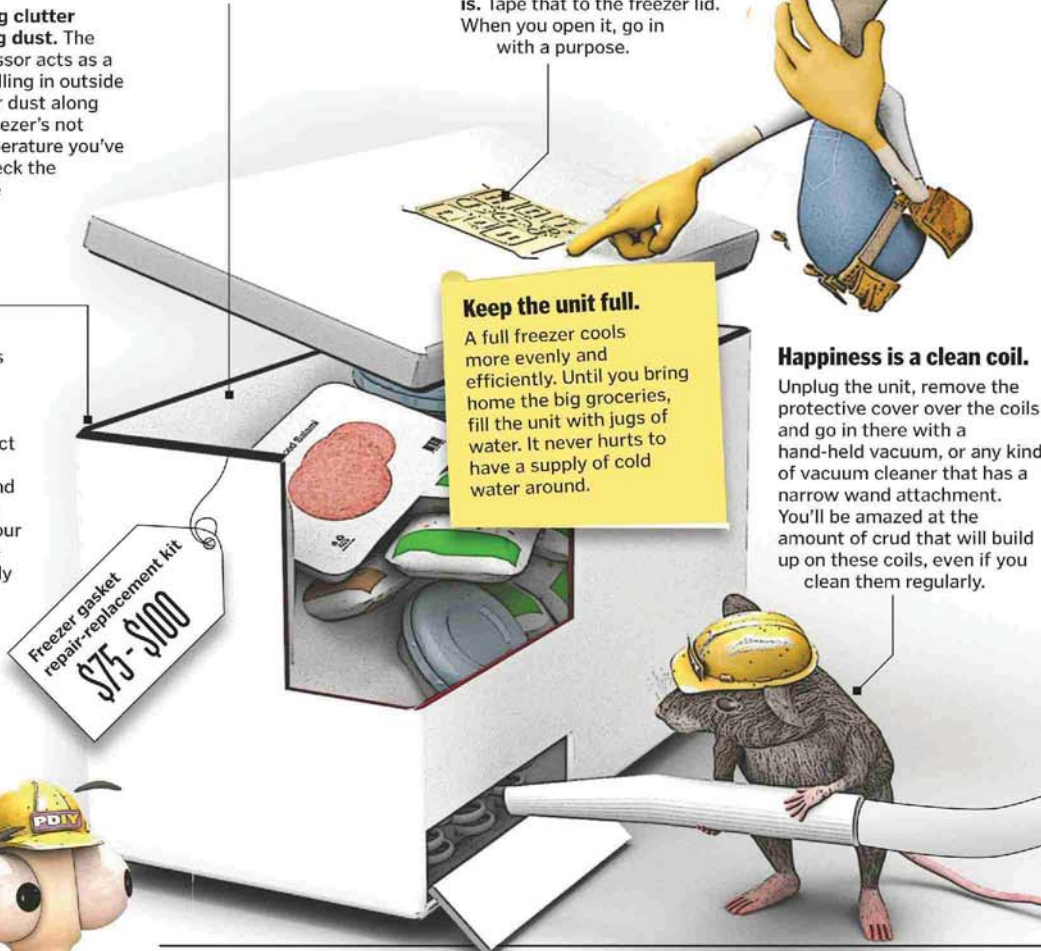


Keep the unit full.

A full freezer cools more evenly and efficiently. Until you bring home the big groceries, fill the unit with jugs of water. It never hurts to have a supply of cold water around.

Happiness is a clean coil.

Unplug the unit, remove the protective cover over the coils and go in there with a hand-held vacuum, or any kind of vacuum cleaner that has a narrow wand attachment. You'll be amazed at the amount of crud that will build up on these coils, even if you clean them regularly.



OK, I'm in over my head.

If you've gone over all these very basic steps, consulted your owner's manual and repair-help sites such as repairclinic.com or selfhelpandmore.com, and you still can't get your chest

freezer to hold a consistent, correct temperature (usually -20° Fahrenheit), then it may be time to pick up the phone and call in a professional. Food-storage temperature ranges are exacting, and close

definitely isn't close enough. If your compressor needs serious maintenance, it's better to play it safe before you find yourself serving a houseful of friends and family with food you pulled out of a balky freezer.

PDIY believes that with a spirit of experimentation and a little sound advice, even the most hardware-challenged homeowners can prolong the lives of their homes and household appliances.

Got a home maintenance problem you'd like us to tackle in future installments? Contact us at homes@plained.com