

Great holiday gifts of home safety for seniors aging in place

By **Dan Howard**
for TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

When we were children, we could have never guessed that “coming home for the holidays” would include checking to see if our parents are safe in their homes. Growing up, it was mom and dad who worried about us, not the other way around.

The holidays are coming and gifts for their safety are a great way to show how much you care about them.

CHECKING ON WHAT THEY NEED FOR SAFETY

Take a walk through the home. Use your senses. If it looks bad or smells bad, take note. Our senses are usually right. A great example is checking the hot water for an odor. Smelly hot water can be an indicator of Legionella or other contamination in the hot water tank. Those contaminations can cause pneumonia.

Look for things that seem unusual. As an example, the rubber jar opener by the bathroom door is a sure sign that they are having trouble opening doorknobs. That would be the time to change a door knob to a lever handle, before they are stuck in a bathroom.

SIMPLE AND ECONOMICAL HOLIDAY GIFTS

Go through the home and change all of the light bulbs. A senior may not be safe climbing on a chair or ladder to change a light bulb. On the other hand, it is difficult to ask someone to come over and change a light bulb.

Installing grab bars and hand rails where needed is a great gift. Proper placement is critical, but a person may need to pose on the commode or get out of a bathtub to determine the right location. Many seniors find it difficult to face the embarrassment of calling a stranger to install these simple but important safety features.

Buy a nice decorative cloth bag. Simply add a visible, but tasteful label that says “Medical Information.” It should be hung near the front door. Medical information is critical during a medical emergency.

Having this bag in plain sight can make a life or death difference in a medical emergency. Having it be pretty, that is a nice bonus.

Change turning door knobs to lever handles. Everyday living is easier with lever handles and when trying to get through a door to call for help or escape a fire, it can make a life or death difference.

Add an exterior blinking light to signal emergency personnel that they have the right home. This does not need to be fancy. It could even be a fun gift like a decoration that can be appropriate as a Christmas decoration but also stay up all year. One example is a star decoration. It could also be as simple as an extension cord run through a window with a colored light bulb screwed into a socket that has a built in blinker. The plug into the wall socket device for making a light blink will be easy to find this time of year in your favorite store’s Christmas decoration area. In our family, a lighted Leprechaun would fit the bill.

Install a keyless combination door lock at an exterior door. Nobody wants to bust down a door to check if someone is OK. Imagine the embarrassment of “oopps, I busted down your door while you were out Christmas shopping”. A code combination lock can provide access to friends, relatives or emergency personnel without the delay that usually occurs before someone is willing to break down a door.

Purchase a freeze alarm. Snowbirds and winter vacationers alike can avoid the possible flooding and major damage of their home if the heat goes out and pipes freeze. There are alarm units that will call out to another phone number before homes or crawl spaces freeze. Many of these are available for under \$ 100.00.

GIFTS OF SAFETY THAT REQUIRE MORE TIME AND MONEY

There is nothing like seeing how a parent is doing than actually seeing their face. This may seem a sneaky way to do this, but make that a Christmas present. Skyping or other computer or phone face programs make a great Christmas gift. They get to see you and maybe the grand kids. You get peace of mind along with a nice conversation. During the holiday visit you will have a few moments to set up and show them how to use the “whatever it is” you give them. This can be a wonderful gift for all parties.

Change bathroom doors to open out toward the hallway instead of into the



bathroom. Many medical emergencies happen in the bathroom. If the door opens outward, help can enter a bathroom without breaking down a door over a fallen person. A quality carpenter should be able to remove a door, turn it around and reinstall it in less than 4 hours.

Many home accidents happen getting into or out of the bathtub. Changing from a bathtub to a shower can cost thousands of dollars, but is much less expensive than the medical bills caused by having a broken hip.

WHEN IDENTIFYING THE HOME SAFETY PROBLEMS ARE BEYOND YOUR SKILL SET

One solution is to have a Senior Home Safety Inspection done. These inspections are available in over 50 cities nationwide and can be ordered as a gift. Inspectors check the home’s systems for safety, but are not going to sell performing any repair work. This eliminates any conflict of interest. The inspectors are trained and have police clearances. Visit www.SeniorHomeSafetyNetwork.com to find a certified inspector near you.

For links to additional information about home safety for seniors, go to: www.envirospect.info/GiftsForSeniors.

Dan Howard is the owner of EnviroSpect. For an environmental consultation call 724 443-6653. For more information visit their website at www.EnviroSpect.info. Email questions to: Dan@EnviroSpectofWesternPA.com. Like us on Facebook or connect @DanHoward251.

