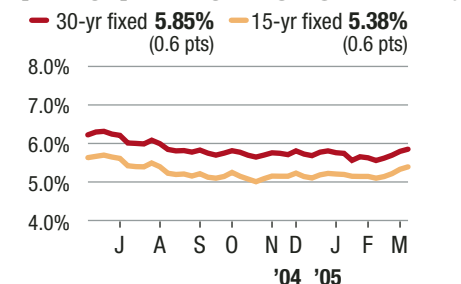


# Real Estate

SECTION H | SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 2005

EWDN

## NATIONAL MORTGAGE RATES



## LON GROSSMAN

Roof cables can help fight ice dams. **PAGE 6H.**

## MS. BUILDER

Worn door, good sidelights pose a problem. **PAGE 6H.**

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### FREE PRESS GUIDE | SPRING REPAIRS PART 2

# 5 HOMEOWNER CHORES WORTH TACKLING

## REPLACING A FAUCET

If your faucet leaks constantly, no matter how many times it's fixed, or it just looks plain ugly, it may be time for a new one. Or perhaps you've been lusting after a high-rise kitchen faucet that would let you fill tall pots, or one with a fancy sprayer nozzle. No matter the reason, replacing a faucet is a task that just about any homeowner with the right tools can do.

**WHAT YOU'LL NEED:** A basin wrench, a tool that lets you unscrew hard-to-reach fittings at a 90-degree angle to the handle; an adjustable wrench; your new faucet; silicon caulk; Teflon tape; a flashlight (for seeing in the dark area under the sink), and possibly penetrating oil if your faucet parts are old and fused.

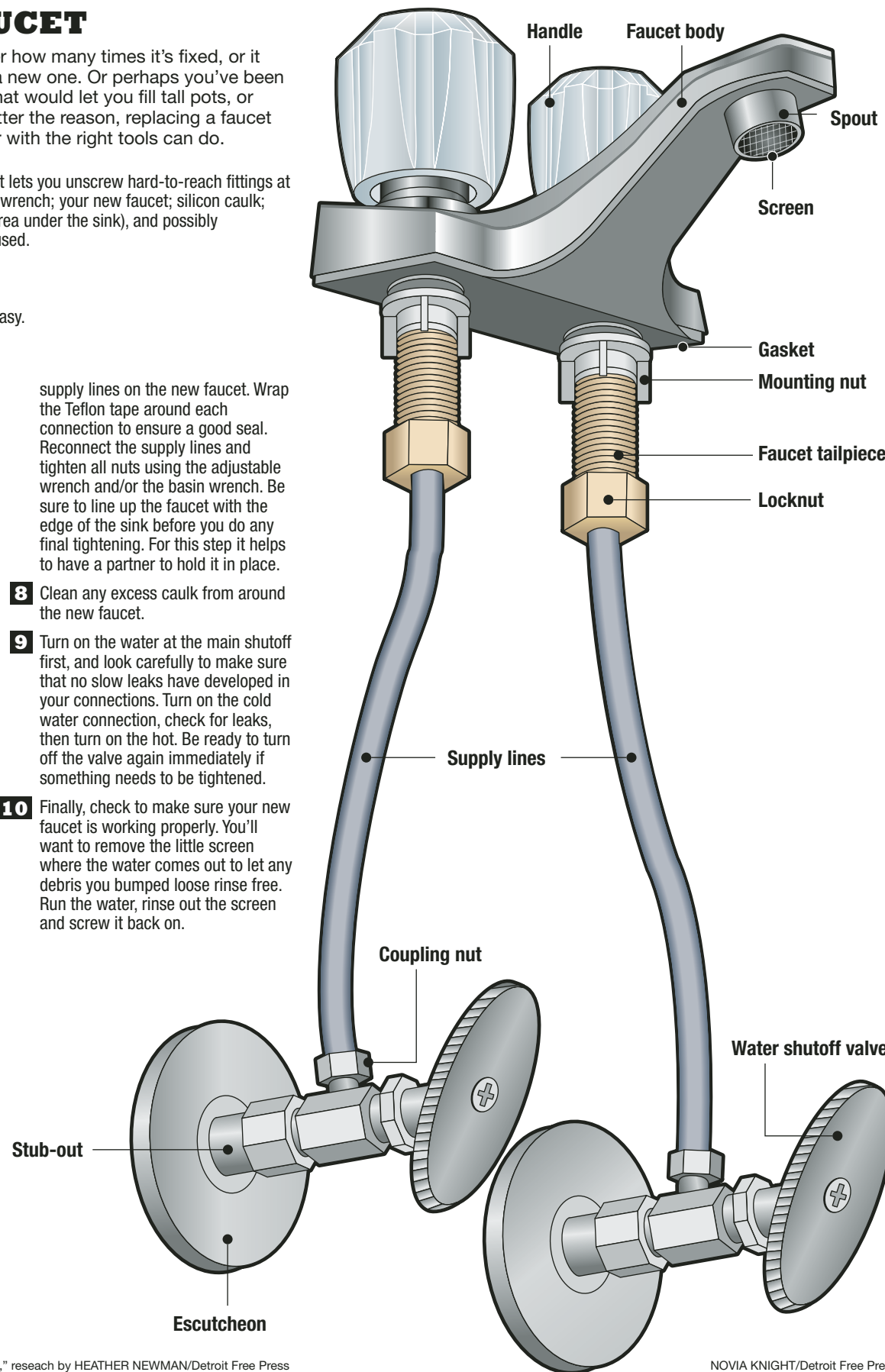
**TIME INVOLVED:** About two hours.

**DIFFICULTY:** If you've got the right tools, fairly easy.

### HOW TO DO IT:

- 1 Turn off the water at the main shutoff valve or the two valves under the sink. I recommend shutting off both; those valves under the sink always leak for me, and nothing's more irritating than working under a sink while you're being dripped on.
- 2 If you're shopping for a faucet, consider a top-mount model on which a piece of metal on top of the sink connects the handles and faucet; there is one less connection to be made, and these fixtures are less complicated for do-it-yourselfers.
- 3 Once you've shut off the water, disconnect the supply lines from the old faucet. You'll see the lock nut that attaches them to the faucet; remove it carefully with your wrench (or your basin wrench, if it's snugged up tightly against the countertop or sink top). Make sure you don't lose the washer. In fact, this would be an excellent time to take one of those washers to the hardware store and pick up fresh ones for the reassembly.
- 4 Now remove the faucet from the sink. Typically, top-mounted faucets are attached with a couple of nuts you unscrew from below with your basin wrench. Use the penetrating oil if the nuts refuse to budge.
- 5 Once the faucet is gone, you can clean the mineral buildup from the area where it was sitting. Watered-down vinegar helps get the gunk off.
- 6 If your new faucet has a rubber or plastic gasket on the bottom where it meets the sink, then you won't need the caulk. Otherwise, run a bead around the faucet base. Settle the faucet into its spot on the sink and press to make sure the caulk (or gasket) makes a good seal.
- 7 Under the sink, put the washers and pieces that connect the faucet to the

- supply lines on the new faucet. Wrap the Teflon tape around each connection to ensure a good seal. Reconnect the supply lines and tighten all nuts using the adjustable wrench and/or the basin wrench. Be sure to line up the faucet with the edge of the sink before you do any final tightening. For this step it helps to have a partner to hold it in place.
- 8 Clean any excess caulk from around the new faucet.
- 9 Turn on the water at the main shutoff first, and look carefully to make sure that no slow leaks have developed in your connections. Turn on the cold water connection, check for leaks, then turn on the hot. Be ready to turn off the valve again immediately if something needs to be tightened.
- 10 Finally, check to make sure your new faucet is working properly. You'll want to remove the little screen where the water comes out to let any debris you bumped loose rinse free. Run the water, rinse out the screen and screw it back on.



Sources: "Time Life Books Complete Fix-It-Yourself Manual," research by HEATHER NEWMAN/Detroit Free Press

By HEATHER NEWMAN  
FREE PRESS TECHNOLOGY WRITER

Get ready, get set, get refurbishing! Last week, we talked about five skills homeowners could learn to help spruce up their homes for spring or for sale. This week, we complete our list of 10 with instructions on how to do everything from installing a phone jack to hiring a contractor. Let's dive right in:

### Maintaining your furnace and water heater

There are limits to what a homeowner can do with two of the biggest appliances: the furnace and water heater. But some maintenance that you can perform can make both function more efficiently.

**What you'll need:** A new furnace

filter, a bucket and a short hose.

**Time involved:** 15 minutes

**Difficulty:** Easy

**How to do it:** Check the furnace filter on your forced-air furnace about every month. You need to check during the heating and cooling seasons because air passes from the blower through the filter at all times of the

year. Pleated filters last a little longer, up to about three months, and permanent filters last forever but need washing about once a month.

Replace the filter with an identically sized model when it starts to show dust. This makes your furnace more efficient.

A contractor should perform other furnace maintenance because it requires a few pieces of specialized equipment and dealing with gas connections. But you only need to call for a checkup every couple of years if you keep the filters changed regularly and everything seems to be functioning all right.

For the water heater, one of the most important things you can do is to drain the sediment that sinks to the

bottom. There's a faucet valve there and if you drain a gallon or two into a bucket once a month, you'll suck a lot of the sludge out with it. Every six months, it's worth considering taking the extra step of shutting off the water and the electricity or gas to the tank and hooking up a hose to that faucet and draining the tank completely. Open all the hot water faucets in the house to drain the lines, and then leave them open as you turn the water and electricity or gas back on. Turn each faucet off after you see water flowing

Please see **TASKS**, Page 2H

## Federal Reserve looks for loan bias

Greenspan says mortgage rates minorities pay are under scrutiny

By GEORGE STEIN  
BLOOMBERG NEWS

The Federal Reserve is examining home mortgage loans to see whether minorities are charged higher interest rates because of discrimination, Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan says.

Banks have been following government policy in making more loans to borrowers deemed less creditworthy, many of whom are minorities, Greenspan said last week in a speech to the Independent Community Bankers of America. The loans carry higher interest rates to balance the increased risk.

"The adoption of risk-based pricing, together with elements of discretion that are often afforded loan officers or brokers in the pricing of credits,

does raise the concern that some borrowers, in fact, may not be treated fairly," Greenspan said.

The Fed is analyzing mortgage lending using data required by the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act. "If screening suggests that there might be a fairness issue, additional information will need to be collected from banks' loan files or other sources," Greenspan said.

The central bank is also working with the Treasury Department, the Department of Justice and other regulators to spell out procedures banks must follow to comply with new anti-money laundering and antiterrorism legislation, he said.

Under the Bank Secrecy Act, banks are required to make reports about suspicious activity by clients or employees.

### Basel II Accord

"All of us want the system to work," Greenspan said, "including the bankers who want to do their part in curbing criminal and terrorist activities."

The Fed intends to monitor the rule-making process to make sure the system works "without excessive burden," he said.

Greenspan also said new bank capital requirements set to come into effect in 2008 under the Basel II Accord may leave community and regional banks at a disadvantage in making small-business loans.

"Where concerns appear valid, we and the other federal banking agencies will this summer propose some options for simple revisions to the current capital rules that would mitigate any unintended and undesired competitive distortions," he said.

## Strengthening economy boosts 30-year mortgage rates

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rates on 30-year mortgage rates hit the highest level in seven months, reflecting four straight weeks of rising rates, a national mortgage survey reported.

Freddie Mac, the mortgage company, said its weekly survey showed that rates on 30-year, fixed rate mortgages averaged 5.85 percent last week, up from 5.79 percent the previous week.

It was the fourth consecutive weekly increase after 30-year

mortgages had fallen for six straight weeks, hitting a low for this year of 5.57 percent the week of Feb. 10. Rates now stand at the highest level since the 30-year mortgage averaged the same 5.85 percent the week ending Aug. 12.

Analysts said that last week's good news on employment, showing that the economy created more than a quarter-million jobs in February raised worries in financial markets about possible future inflation caused by stronger-than-expected economic growth.

"Last Friday's employment re-

port reinforced the perception that the economy is on sure footing, leading bond markets to push interest rates higher again this week," Freddie Mac economist Amy Crews Cutts said Thursday. "Although inflation remains tame, the recent spike in oil prices does put inflationary pressures on the economy and was an additional factor causing higher interest rates."

Still, analysts said mortgage rates should rise only gradually this year if the Federal Reserve keeps to its current course of grad-

ual quarter-point increases in short-term rates.

Freddie Mac is forecasting that the 30-year mortgage will be around 6.25 percent at the end of the year.

Sales of both new and existing homes set records for four straight years, but analysts are predicting a slight fall-off in the sales pace this year as mortgage rates continue rising.

Other mortgage rates were up as well last week, Freddie Mac reported.

Rates on 15-year, fixed-rate

mortgages, a popular option for refinancing, rose to 5.38 percent last week, up from 5.33 percent the previous week. Rates on one-year adjustable-rate mortgages climbed to 4.24 percent last week, compared to 4.14 percent the previous week.

Five-year hybrid adjustable rate mortgages averaged 5.22 percent last week, up from 5.17 percent the previous week. These hybrid mortgages have a fixed rate for five years and then adjust each year after that.

The nationwide averages for

mortgage rates do not include add-on fees known as points. The 30-year mortgage, 15-year and five-year ARM all carried a fee of 0.6 point. The one-year ARM had a financing fee of 0.7 point.

A year ago, 30-year mortgages averaged 5.41 percent while the 15-year mortgage was at 4.69 percent and the one-year ARM was at 3.41 percent. Freddie Mac does not have historical data yet on the five-year ARM.

For more information, go to the Freddie Mac Web site, [www.freddiemac.com](http://www.freddiemac.com)