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Avalanche of calls sends a mattress message

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

This week, EcoConsumer responds to a few readers' questions and comments.

Q: In [your Sept. 8 column](#) about recycling and disposal of mattresses, you implied that it is difficult to give away a mattress, no matter what shape it's in.

However, I had a mattress we no longer needed that was still in great condition. I put an ad in a local newspaper offering it for free. Over three days, I had 67 calls for that mattress! Some people were in tears, saying they didn't have a bed, or their children had been sleeping on the floor for months. I was happy I could give it to someone who really needed it.

Don't you agree that if someone has a good used mattress, he should make an effort to give it away?

A: I absolutely agree. But before anyone offers a mattress through classified ads or online exchanges, he should make sure it is not too old or worn, and has no rips, stains or odors.

Also, although many charities will not accept mattresses, the local council of St. Vincent de Paul (www.stvincentdepaul-seattle.org) will accept or pick up "queen-size or smaller, inner-spring mattresses without buttons" in good condition.

Q: We are thinking of installing tubular skylights in our house to brighten up the rooms. What do we need to know?

A: Tubular skylights, also known as solar tubes, consist of a highly-reflective tube between the roof and the ceiling. They cost \$150 to \$600, not including installation, and are usually simpler to install than standard skylights. The narrow diameter of the tube (10 to 22 inches) allows it to fit between roof rafters or trusses.

These work well to light a hallway, staircase, windowless bathroom or a dark corner of a living room.

Solar tubes bring more daylight into your home and reduce energy costs, since you won't have to turn the lights on as often.

In a Puget Sound Energy (PSE) promotion, customers who purchase a new roof through PSE's Contractor Referral Service by Nov. 15 will receive a free Energy Star-certified tubular skylight (call 800-562-1482 for information).

Q: I'm a senior citizen, and I would like some information about safety and environmental issues regarding space heaters. Lots of seniors have them.

A: If you just want to raise the temperature in one room, space heaters may conserve a small amount of energy and save a little money on heating bills. But safety is a major concern with these units. In 2003, space heaters were involved in 26 percent of home heating fires, and in a shocking 73 percent of the deaths from those fires, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

Although electric space heaters generally cost more to operate than combustion space heaters, the electric types are the only unvented space heaters safe to use inside your home, says the U.S. Department of Energy.

Plug your electric space heater directly into a wall outlet with sufficient capacity (no extension cords). And be sure to buy a space heater with a safety switch that automatically turns the unit off if it tips over.

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