

# Fact or Fiction?

## Evaluating the Bad Rap Given to Door Closers

by John Linder

I really am not a writer, but I do read a great deal, and lately it seems there has been much ado regarding door closers. People write about the intricacies of installation, construction, maintenance, and even the aspect of whose door closer might yet be a better mousetrap than someone else's.

Like the gifted oracle Lyle R. Hill, I try to reduce complex situations into their simplest form so the matter can be better understood. This gets me into a lot of trouble at times, particularly with some engineers and AHC types, but generally it works well for most of our customers whose lives seem to be already complicated by more important matters.

### A BIT OF HISTORY

When it comes to door closers we must keep in mind that we are not talking about space shuttle technology. Truthfully, not a whole lot has changed since Eugene Bount and Louis Norton began tinkering with the first door closers in the mid 1880's. A rack and pinion mechanism still compresses a spring, which when released pulls the door closed, with the closing and latching speed controlled by the flow of door check fluid through a series of ports and valves. This remains much the same today as when Bount figured it out back in 1888.

Sure, door closers look a little different today,

just as automobiles today look different from the black boxes that Henry Ford produced. But, unlike automobiles, door closers haven't changed all that much on the inside or in their functionality.

Marketeers, the men and women who attempt to shape out purchasing decisions, have come up with several interesting articles and marketing ploys to promote their particular door closers. This is where it gets really interesting- and yes confusing. Granted, I tend to be a little close to the subject, and perhaps I am somewhat biased, but for the most part I derive a great deal of entertainment from reading some of these articles. For example: is an aluminum casting better than cast iron? Is a synthetic door check fluid better than a petroleum-based product? Do state-of-the-art plastic valves last longer than brass valves? Does an installation template really make it easier for an installer who already has previous experience installing door closers? Is a 25-year warranty really any better than a ten-year warranty, or even a five-year warranty? Better yet, who's even going to remember where the door closer originated five years from now?

All this makes for some interesting writing, but what happens if we reduce the topic down to its simplest form? Remember now, we're not talking about space shuttle technology, or even simple brain surgery.

## **FACTORS ATTRIBUTING TO DEFECTIVE CLOSERS**

Door closers often get a bad rap for the problems they allegedly cause on a job. After more than 33 years of careful record keeping, our company has determined that alleged defective door closers are the result of four primary factors. In descending order of occurrence, they are:

### **1. MISAPPLICATION OR SPECIFICATION:**

In these cases, the wrong door closer was specified or chosen for the job. The door closer was either too strong for the door, resulting in the door being too hard to pull open, or too weak for the door, resulting in the door hanging open. Additionally, there could have been no Back-Check for an exterior door exposed to a high-wind elevation.

### **2. INCORRECT INSTALLATION**

The geometry of how a door closer works, although not in the class of brain surgery, does need to follow the manufacturer's installation recommendation in order for the door closer to function properly. It never ceases to amaze us when we survey a job site problem and we find an installation that appears to have been done by an 11-year old who either couldn't read, or perhaps was blind. Of course the door closer doesn't work. Yes, an installation template might have helped, but an installer who won't read the installation instructions probably will toss away the template even before the door closer is removed from the box. The key to a successful installation is to not get too creative. Keep it "simple-stupid" and follow the installation instructions!

### **3. USER ABUSE:**

We have all seen and experienced it, and many of us have been abusers ourselves. We cringe when we get that dreaded telephone call

regarding that high school job we finished last month, don't we? Fortunately, some abuse of the product is expected and anticipated in the product design. There are other abusive situations we bring on ourselves. A good example is when there is a wall or planter behind the door, and the door closer is installed in such a manner that it is used as a doorstop. No door closer is built for this purpose and it is an accident waiting to happen. Remember one important thing: it is a door closer, not a doorstop, and not a jungle gym to hang from, nor is it designed to withstand hurricane gale force winds.

### **4. DEFECTIVE PRODUCT:**

Yes, unfortunately there are defective door closers... and there is no denying them. Door closers are still manufactured by people, even though production automation continues to increase. As such, there is a margin for error that can result in a defective door closer. Usually, the culprit is a leak, and most often the leak stems from either a defective, or more likely than not, a worn or torn O-ring as the result of wear or user tampering. And as we all know, O-rings can wreak havoc with all sorts of devices. (Yes, even with space shuttles.)

I must point out that the true defective door closer, one that leaks, malfunctions or fails for any reason, is the least problematic of the four topics discussed in this article. More often than not, the door closer is simply getting a bad rap.

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