

► she focuses on youth health. If you can repaint the place, or at least hire certified professionals to address those problem areas, then all should be fine; intact lead paint isn't a hazard, especially if it's sealed beneath layers of nontoxic stuff. As for the pipes, get your water tested; if it's unsafe, invest in a reverse-osmosis purification machine, put in new pipes, or commit to buying bottled water by the truckload.

Sgo ahead and ignore your mother-in-law, but be sure to remain vigilant. Once the kid drops, you should regularly check for flaky paint and suspicious dust, and make sure your pediatrician tests your progeny for lead at regular intervals. Too lazy for that regimen? Then perhaps you'd better start looking for shelter built after the Carter administration.

I spend almost all my phone time on my cell these days, so I'm tempted to cancel my landline. But will I rue that decision when disaster strikes? I'm worried that the mobile network will get knocked out.

There's a reason to be wary of ditching your landline, but it has nothing to do with reliability. Cell towers are now robust enough to stand up to Mother Nature's bullying. "As we saw after the Haiti earthquake, mobile

networks are building up their resiliency," says Craig Fugate, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. "People were using cell phones to stay in touch."

What should give you pause is the fact that, unlike landlines, cell phones don't automatically provide 911 operators with your home address. That could be a problem if you ever need help but can't talk—say, if you're in the midst of a heart attack or you're hiding in a closet because your house has been overrun by cyborg assassins.

In such cases, the authorities might still be able to track you down (depending on your mobile carrier) using GPS or—provided you're within range of three cell towers—triangulation. You may also be able to register your cell number and address with local emergency services—though that can cause confusion if you dial 911 while out and about.


So is it worthwhile to keep a landline? If you're young and healthy, several hundred bucks a year may seem steep for peace of mind. Maybe you'd do better to spend the cash on something that'll minimize your odds of ever needing 911 in the first place. A gym membership could help stave off a heart attack, for example. And a spike-filled moat might frustrate the cyborgs.



As part of an ongoing midlife crisis, I'd like to pursue my childhood dream of flying around with a personal jetpack. How can I accomplish this? Do I need FAA clearance?

There is surprisingly little red tape between you and a rocket belt. Assuming that whatever unit you get your hands on weighs no more than 254 pounds, carries 5 gallons or less of fuel, and zooms forward at no more than 63 miles per hour, the FAA will consider it an ultralight vehicle. That means you don't need a license to operate it—you just need to obey certain regulations, like avoiding populated areas and confining your flights to daylight hours.

The real trick here isn't satisfying the bureaucrats but rather coming up with the hardware. A few companies have vowed to start selling off-the-shelf jetpacks in the not-too-distant future, for prices starting around \$100,000, but their plans always seem to encounter delay after delay.

Of course, you could always build your own. Do you have a strong background in aerospace engineering and a garage full of advanced fabrication tools? If not, consider scaling back your dreams just a tad. There is no shame in parasailing. 

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Tattoo Detectives

Cover up! That body art could give you away.

Crooks may wear gloves and masks to hide their identity, but few think to cover their ink. If there's a video record of a crime, cops can sometimes use exposed tats to identify a perp or at least his gang affiliation. But trying to match a specific piece of inkwork against a vast photo database has been like searching for an image on AltaVista in 1998. Police have relied on archaic keyword tagging ("animal," "female face," and that old favorite, "other"). "It doesn't work very well," says Michigan State University biometrics expert Anil K. Jain, who received FBI funding to develop an alternative tentatively called Tattoo-ID. Jain's software quickly compares a suspect's tattoo (lo-res sources like surveillance footage or a cop's phone camera work fine) with tens of thousands of tattoos from known criminals. Like fingerprint-ID software, it works by matching telltale visual features in the images themselves. The tech has been licensed by a firm called MorphoTrak, which will start beta-testing it with state and local law enforcement in December. Hoodlums had better invest in some long-sleeve turtle-necks. —Marina Krakovsky