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## Preface

I have since stopped sending postcards because my view on routine maintenance has changed. I no longer see the need for routine maintenance and tell the customer to call only when the clock presents problems of any kind.

For more information on that please see the file flatrates.doc or flatrates.pdf. Both files are identical in different formats.

I've left the article below original because if someone is just starting out in the clock repair business, then this is a good way to generate some future business.

## Original article

I was asked via E-mail the following:

>I am interested in finding out the frequency of the average  
>house call for clocks that we service.

My usual follow up period is 3 to 5 years for in home work. In the home, I remove the movement and perform a surface cleaning, both on the inside and outside of the pivots holes, right in the house on the "every day" table with lots of old towels thrown over it to protect it from scratches. I clean with toothpicks, and sometimes a flat nosed pliers holding the toothpick and if necessary, cotton swabs. I try to avoid the swaps because of the potential of leaving "fibers" behind but there are times when I have no choice. Especially if the prior "repair person" was in love with grease. This job can take anywhere from 1/2 hour to 1 1/2 hours and is usually around the 40 minute mark. At three or five year intervals, I send a postcard reminder.

My house calls are a real attempt to solve the problem(s). I withdraw the movement and find a place to work with the customer's permission. I always ask them to supply an old towel or something to protect whatever surface I'll be working on. I ask them if I could use their "everyday" table or a table that is outside or on the porch. Light is so much better outside. Then I perform a surface cleaning and lubrication. Surface cleaning done with toothpicks and synthetic 5W motor oil for the lubrication. I bring along many suspension springs, different sized cables, weight tops (hooks) and bottoms, various "E" clips, many different sized tapered brass pins, different sized hand nuts, different sized hand washers, a set of cutting broaches, a clock punch and staking set, virtually all my tools which are duplicated in my portable tool box, and finally my visor and reading glasses.

One of the most important things that I do on a house call is remove the verge and "simulate" the clock's

running for a few hours by pulling on the chain or cable and allow the clock to run freely prior to the surface cleaning and lubrication. This must be done with all time pivots bearings lubricated first! This loosens up most of the time train dirt and old lubricant and also takes out some minor burrs that have accumulated over the years.

For the above, I charge \$200.00, within a 10 mile radius and \$300.00 within a 11 to 25 mile radius, with no warranty in any way and if the movement need more attention, then it's overhauled in the shop with my usual overhaul charges. Overhauls are always warranted for at least two years.

I will not make any house call or set-up over the 25 mile radius because it is not worth my time at any price.

If the clock fails within 30 days from the date I performed the in-home service and the customer wants an overhaul, then I wave my pick up delivery charges. This safeguards the customer if the initial service call does not do the trick.

In general, I schedule my house calls for Mondays and some Tuesdays and I view these days as paid days off. I separate the calls into 2 hours intervals and do only 3 a day. At this pace, I can easily make each call on time, that's a must in this business, and I'm usually done about 5 hours after I have started. All in all, an easy day and I'm usually \$600.00 ahead (\$200.00 X's 3) and just met some interesting people and finally gotten away from the computer and the bench.

I was also asked the following in the same E-mail.

>Myself, I service mostly modern grandfathers. We are dealers for  
>Howard Miller, Ridgeway and Sligh. Our customers are contacted  
>every 2 years for an in-house oiling (\$80). For cable driven  
>clocks we give a complete ultrasonic cleaning and overhaul on  
>the 8th year, and for chain drives on the 10th year (\$280).  
>All work comes with a one year guarantee.

There are many factors that "govern" my time frames. Frankly, anything under 3 years is excessive if the customer is paying for your service each and every time. Personally, I cannot see the reason for the time differences on the cable vs. chain driven movements. If anything, which I do not differentiate at present, the chain should be more often because of more customer involvement in the winding and the more herky-jerky way it is wound. Anything that increases customer involvement should be looked at more often because of the laws of probability or what I like to say is "The Murray Luck" which is a spin-off of Murphy's Law.

If the past service was a house call, then every 3 years for maintenance, works out nicely but more recently I have changed that to every 5 for the very well build clocks such as the Winterhalder & Hofmeier's, that I see occasionally. In very general terms, if the plates are in

excess of 3 mm thick then I advise the customer to have service every 5 years and every 10 would not be outrageous.

If I overhauled the clocks then I advise a "clean and lube" every 5 years and if that clock was a quality piece then every 10 years is easily enough and what I recommend.

I should point out that on my overhauls I use a 100% synthetic motor oil. I believe "cheaper" oils will dry out within the above time frames and end up doing the customers a disservice rather than saving them anything on the less frequent service.

A service from, E-mail address: Mike@atmos-man.com  
Mike Murray Founder of Clocksmiths

A specialist in Atmos and 400-day clock repair.  
Also, I overhaul most plug in electric clocks.  
In continuous horological service since 04/01/1982.

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