

What to expect from a furnace inspection (298 words)

(NC)—The old adage “if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it” should not apply when it comes to your household heating system. Like a car, your furnace is a running machine that needs regular tune-ups to ensure its efficiency and longevity. You wouldn’t wait more than a year to give your car an oil change, so don’t wait until your furnace breaks down to call for service.

A clean, well-adjusted heating system will save you money on fuel and will prolong furnace life. The cost of annual servicing is modest, especially when compared with the price of a new furnace.

There is some maintenance that homeowners can undertake themselves, such as the cleaning and replacing of filters. To ensure safe and efficient operation of a heating system, however, homeowners should have their furnace inspected and cleaned annually by a qualified service technician.

Homeowners searching for a qualified heating contractor in their area can access a user-friendly website - www.hrai.ca or toll-free at 1-877-467-HRAI. This site lists contractor members of the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Contractors of Canada (HRAC), a national trade association. Inspections performed by a licensed technician will include the following:

- Safety test for carbon monoxide (CO)
- Check for hazardous debris in the chimney and flue
- Clean air filters and re-install
- Check operation of thermostat and safety controls
- Check gas pilot safety system and clean as required
- Clean motor and fan
- Check blower operation
- Check condition, tension and alignment of fan belt, and perform required adjustments
- Clean burners and set for proper combustion & ignition
- Check gas piping to furnace.

Investing in the proper maintenance of a home heating system is essential to ensure that it provides reliable and efficient indoor comfort when the outdoor temperature drops.

- *News Canada*

Choose a contractor after careful consideration (316 words)

(NC)—While homeowners willingly choose to undertake many kinds of home renovations, installation and/or repair of heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration equipment is usually considered an exceptional measure. The purchase of a furnace, air conditioner or ventilation system is a major investment and because of its importance in your daily life, it deserves careful consideration.

When making such an investment, probably the most important decision to be made is about the company that will install and service the equipment. To maximize your comfort, safety and peace of mind, be sure to deal only with qualified, professional contractors.

Most provinces require the hiring of a licensed or qualified HVACR tradesman to perform the work because of the safety concerns and consequences involved. However, homeowners frequently do not distinguish among contractors on anything other than price. You should be aware, however, that the lowest price is not always the best value.

There are some obvious red flags to look for when shopping for a contractor:

- Reputable contractors will not quote prices over the phone without seeing the job.
- Reputable contractors will not request large cash advances prior to the delivery of any equipment or materials.
- Reputable contractor will readily provide a full business address as well as a telephone number where the company can be reached. Reputable contractors will be happy to give you the names and addresses of customers they’ve done work for in your area. You may wish to contact the Better Business Bureau, which maintains records of consumer complaints about its members. You should also ask whether the contractor is a member of the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Contractors of Canada (HRAC-Canada).

HRAC, a division of HRAI, requires its members to carry relevant trade, fuel safety and municipal licenses as well as workers’ compensation and liability insurance. They also list their members in good standing on a consumer website: www.hrai.ca.

- *News Canada*

Find comfort in these home-heating tips (170 words)

(NC)—Whether you heat your home with oil, natural gas, or electricity, homeowners will find comfort in these tips to help you save money and stay warm this winter.

- Conduct an energy audit of your home to help assess the efficiency of your current heating system.
- Wrap your hot water heater in an insulating jacket.
- Clean or replace filters on forced-air furnaces.
- Schedule an annual tune-up for your boiler, furnace or heat pump to ensure that your heating equipment is operating at peak efficiency. You can locate a qualified, certified, licensed and insured heating contractor online at www.hrai.ca. or toll-free at 1-877-467-HRAI.
- Install a programmable thermostat that will automatically lower the temperature when you are away from the home or at nighttime.
- Close off heating vents in rooms that are not regularly occupied. When replacing your home heating system, consider a high-efficiency model. It may cost more to buy than other models, however their lower operating costs may save you money in the long run.

- *News Canada*

Find these articles at www.newscanada.com and on the September 2008 CD

Achieving energy efficiency through “right sizing” (318 words)

(NC)—If your home heating system is more than 15 years old, this fall is a great time to consider upgrading your equipment to more energy efficient models, all the more because of the large number of government, utility and manufacturer incentive programs in effect.

If you do make the decision to replace your heating and/or cooling system, be sure to insist that the installing contractor “sizes” the system properly. To determine the correct heating or cooling capacity of your system, a contractor should perform a “heat loss and heat gain calculation”. This calculation relies on an assessment of the size and age of the home, insulation levels of walls and attic, the type and number of windows, air infiltration, and other factors that influence the rate at which your home loses heat. It also ensures that the duct system, both supply and return, is sufficient to support the equipment chosen, thereby maximizing energy savings.

“Right-sizing” of replacement equipment is one of the most commonly overlooked methods for ensuring that you get the most from your system. Properly size equipment performs more effectively and more efficiently and provides optimal comfort and energy efficiency benefits. If your contractor refuses to do one, talk to someone else.

Over-sizing equipment can result in increased fuel consumption and higher operating costs, potential premature parts failure, higher noise levels, and reduced comfort (hot or cold spots within the home). On the other hand, under sizing can also result in higher operational costs, particularly with today’s sophisticated models. The units will be working at full capacity most of the time, which can lead to premature breakdowns and, more generally, reduced comfort levels.

Always get two or three quotes when considering purchasing new HVACR equipment, and make sure the contractor includes the cost of performing a heat loss/heat gain calculation. You can find a qualified contractor by calling HRAI at 1-866-467-HRAI.

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