

## Find comfort in these home-heating tips

(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.hrac.ca](http://www.hrac.ca).

- 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.

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## What to expect from a furnace inspection

(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.hrac.ca](http://www.hrac.ca) or toll-free at 1-877-411-HRAC. 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.

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## Home Improvement

### Choose a contractor after careful consideration

(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 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.hrac.ca](http://www.hrac.ca).

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## What’s hot in home heating?

(NC)—Renovations and home improvements are a growing trend among Canadian homeowners. One project that may not be on the top of your list, but is definitely worth considering, is installing hydronic (water) radiant floor heating.

Radiant floor heating is a method of heating your home by applying heat underneath or within the floor. Comparable to warming yourself in the sun, this type of heating warms objects as opposed to raising the temperature of the air.

A typical radiant floor heating system consists of a series of tubes set in a bed of lightweight concrete or other similar material, then covered by any standard floor covering. Hot water is circulated

through the tubing, which warms the bedding material and radiates heat up from the floor to warm the entire house.

The cost of an installing a hydronic radiant floor heating system will depend on your specific heating and energy efficiency requirements and in addition to the heating system, a mechanical ventilation system is required in the house. Homeowners should consult with a qualified heating contractor who will explain your options. You can locate a qualified contractor specializing in hydronic heating online at [www.hrac.ca](http://www.hrac.ca) or toll-free at 1-877-411-4722.

There are a lot of advantages to radiant floor heating besides the warmth under your feet.

There are no heat registers in the floor or heaters in the wall to restrict the placement of furniture and window coverings. Since there is no airflow forcing the heat into the rooms, there are no drafts or unpleasant air currents, and wall and ceiling surfaces stay cleaner. Radiant floor heat is silent, and there are no filters to clean.

On the down side, this is a heat-only system – if you want central air conditioning you’ll still have to install a duct system. And since room air does not circulate through the system as it does with a forced air system, you can’t add optional, whole-house accessories such as an electronic air cleaner or a humidifier.

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