

Furnace maintenance saves fuel costs

Periodic inspection and regular maintenance of heating and cooling equipment can reduce fuel bills by as much as 10 per cent, and save the inconvenience and expense of equipment breakdown.

The Department of Energy (DOE) urges homeowners to have their heating/cooling system checked every year or so, by a qualified specialist. Oil-fired systems should be checked every year; gas-fired systems should be checked every two or three years; and electric systems should be checked in accordance with manufacturer's specifications.

To find a qualified heating/cooling repair specialist, check the yellow pages for names, then call two or three and ask for written proposals for performing routine maintenance. Check out the people you call with the Better Business Bureau and other homeowners in your area.

Maintenance Procedures The Homeowner Can Perform

No matter what type of system you have, there are some steps you can take to keep it functioning smoothly. Information or required maintenance procedures is covered in equipment manuals and maintenance booklets that come with the units. If you do not have the original manuals, check the yellow pages to obtain the names and phone numbers of authorized brand-name equipment dealers. Very often, they can help you obtain the manual you need. Or, contact your local gas or electric utility or fuel oil supplier. They are usually willing to show customers basic procedures that may save them the time and expense of making emergency calls later.

Below, DOE answers some commonly-asked questions about maintenance procedures that will save you energy dollars:

Q. What regular care should I give my forced-air system?

A. First, clean the filters regularly.

• All forced-air control heating and cooling systems require filters to trap dust and dirt in the air. These filters should be cleaned or replaced once every 30-60 days. Do not allow dirty filters to remain in your furnace; they restrict the flow of air, and therefore reduce the system's efficiency.

... Second, inspect, clean, and oil the blower unit.

• In most heating units, a blower or fan moves air from the unit to the ducts. This blower can get dirty. To clean the blower, turn off all electric power to the unit. Use a toothbrush to clean the blades; a larger wire brush will be needed for the area around the fan. Finally, use the hose from your vacuum cleaner to remove all the loosened dirt from the fan unit.

• Bearings in the electric motor and fan of the blower unit should be lubricated once or twice a year. Oiling instructions are usually stamped on the motor nameplate, or included in the instruction manual.

• In most units, the blower receives its power from a fan belt connected between it and the motor. Proper tension on the belt will help provide maximum efficiency. Turn off the power. Then check the tension, by pressing down on the middle of the belt. If the belt depresses by more than 1/2 inch, it is too slack. Adjust the tension screws on the mounting frame that fasten the motor to the blower housing until you can't depress the belt more than 1/4 to 1/2 inch.

... Third, clean, or inspect vents, registers and ducts regularly.

• Make sure air vents and return registers are clean and unobstructed. A vacuum cleaner will do a good job of removing lint, dust, and dirt. But grease often accumulates on kitchen vents and registers. To clean them, remove the grills and wash them in hot, sudsy water to dissolve the accumulated grease.

• Check the ducts for air leaks when the heating or air-conditioning unit is on. Run your hand slowly over the ducts. If you feel air seeping out, there is a leak. Repair leaks by wrapping the ducts with duct tape, available at hardware and plumbing supply stores. If ducts run through unheated spaces, wrap them with insulation.

Q. Should chimneys be inspected regularly?

A. Yes.

• If you have a gas or oil-fired system check the inside of your chimney carefully each heating season. Repair loose bricks and mortar, cracked lining, and other leaks promptly.

Q. What care does the air-conditioning unit require?

A. Replace filters regularly, and protect the condenser unit.

• The outside condenser unit of the central air-conditioning system should receive as little direct sunlight as possible since heat reduces its efficiency and wastes energy. However, if shrubbery provides shading for the unit, it should be trimmed so as not to block air flow.

• The condenser unit should also be cleaned regularly. If its surface is blocked by mud, leaves, dirt, or grass clippings, energy is wasted.

Q. What can I do if the furnace stops operating?

A. Don't panic. The problem may be simple, and one you can remedy yourself.

• If your furnace burns oil, make sure the fuel tank is

not empty. Check the electric switch that may control the blower or some other function of the heating unit. The switch may have been turned off. Also check the fuse or circuit breaker that controls the furnace to see if it's functioning.

• If your unit is gas-fired, check other gas appliances to make sure your main gas supply has not been cut off. If that doesn't solve the problem, check the pilot light. Instructions for relighting the pilot light appear on the front of most units.

• If these steps do not restore the furnace to operation, call your heating/cooling repair specialist or the utility company that provides service in your area. If the unit is fueled by oil, call your fuel oil dealer.

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EXAMPLES OF HOMEOWNER LOANS AND PAYMENTS

Amount of the loan	Amount of Monthly Payment	Number of Payments	Period of Payments	FINANCE CHARGE	Total of Payments
\$ 5,000	\$110.85	60	5 Years	\$ 1,651.00	\$ 6,651.00
7,500	166.27	60	5 Years	2,476.20	9,976.20
10,000	221.69	60	5 Years	3,301.40	13,301.40
10,000	119.05	180	15 Years	11,429.00	21,429.00
15,000	178.58	180	15 Years	17,144.40	32,144.40
20,000	238.11	180	15 Years	22,859.80	42,859.80

ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE: 11.85%

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