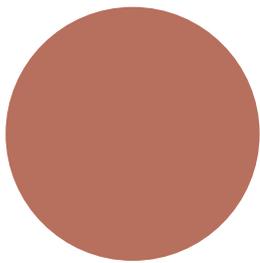
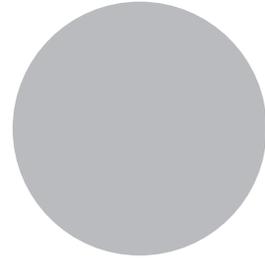
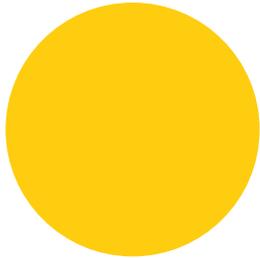


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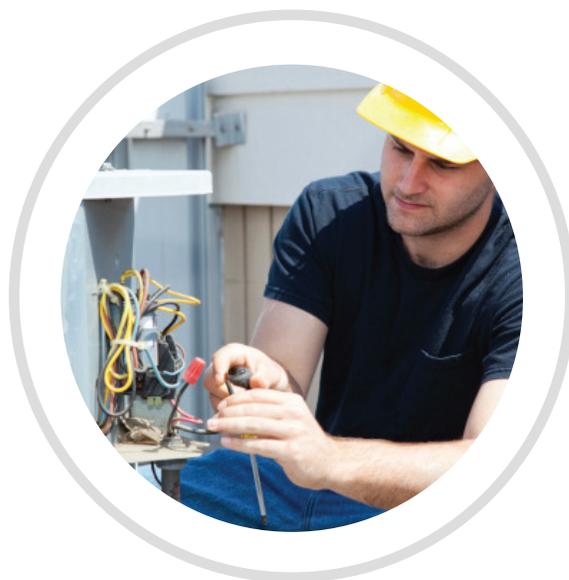


HVAC Maintenance Guide

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How often do you run your home's heating and air-conditioning system? Unless you're one of the lucky few who live where the climate is ideal almost every day, it probably gets quite a workout. Depending on where you reside, your home's HVAC equipment could be used for several months in the winter or summer or practically all year long. Energy Star, the government's website dedicated to educating consumers about energy efficiency, estimates that up to half your home's energy costs could pass through the HVAC system.

So how can you go about lowering those costs? This is a concern for many families during periods of rising energy prices. Installing new high-efficiency equipment is one way to reduce costs, but that may not be in your budget. Another option is ensuring your existing HVAC system is operating at peak efficiency and that's often just a matter of performing some DIY-friendly maintenance chores around your home.



DIY Home HVAC Maintenance

There are several different types of residential HVAC systems, but in most cases they consist of indoor and outdoor equipment and a series of ducts that circulate air throughout your home. The equipment warms or cools the indoor air and then blows it into the main supply trunk lines of the system. Branch supply lines come off the trunk line ducts to direct the conditioned air into the various rooms of your home. There are also return air ducts that gather the indoor air from several central points in your house and take it back to the equipment to be re-conditioned.

Having your indoor and outdoor equipment serviced on a regular basis by a qualified technician can keep them running at peak efficiency and may help avoid expensive repairs. However, this is a job that DIYers should never attempt -- not only is it possible to damage the equipment, you could also be seriously injured. The good news is that's only one part of working to keep your HVAC energy costs low. There are several DIY-friendly maintenance tasks that can also help:

- **Filters.** The air in your home is full of tiny dust particles that you may not be able to see, but can clog up the inside of your HVAC equipment. Contractors protect the equipment by installing filters in the return ducts to catch the particles, but in time they may become so saturated that the equipment has to work harder to pull in the return air. Replacing or cleaning the filters as needed can help your system run more efficiently and may even prevent damage to the equipment. Filter location can vary, but they are normally just inside the central return vents or in the trunk line where it enters the furnace.
- **Insulation.** The supply ducts in many homes pass through unconditioned areas such as attics and crawl spaces that can affect the temperature of the conditioned air being moved. The ducts should be thoroughly insulated in these areas and checked regularly to ensure the protection hasn't been torn or disrupted. You're paying to heat or cool the air in those

ducts so don't let a hot or cold attic add to your costs.

- **Duct leaks.** While they may be difficult to find, anywhere you have conditioned air leaking from a duct is a lot like money falling out of your pocket. Anytime you're remodeling and have ductwork exposed, check to ensure all joints are tight and there aren't any punctures that may be allowing air to escape. A little bit of duct tape can usually solve the problem. Basement, crawl space, and attic lines should also be checked when you have the opportunity -- all it takes is a little bump or jar and you could be paying for conditioned air to go where it's not needed.
- **Condenser blockages** If you have central AC and an outdoor condenser, it needs room to circulate air efficiently. Grass that grows too high, shrubbery, and even leaves can obstruct its operation and may even damage the unit. Maintain about two feet of clear space around the equipment.

These are just a few DIY tips for maintaining your home's HVAC system -- ask your HVAC contractor for additional suggestions on how you can help your equipment run at peak efficiency.

