

How to Identify A Good Heating And Cooling Contractor

17 Things NOT To Do When Choosing A Contractor To Replace Your Old Equipment

The most important part of shopping for a new indoor comfort system is to pick the right contractor. Choose the *wrong one*, and you risk getting a new system that won't keep you comfortable, won't save you much if anything on your monthly utility bills, and may even fail after only a few years of operation.

In order to get the efficiency and comfort you deserve, you must find a contractor who will:

- select the right size of equipment for your home,
- install it properly, and
- uncover - and solve - any pre-existing problems with your duct system or house insulation.

(Refer to Comfort Institute **Special Report #2** for a detailed discussion of these issues.)

Here's how to identify a contractor who will do the best job, be easiest to work with, and provide reliable service. More important, here's how to avoid picking one of the many contractors who might take shortcuts at your expense.

Don't Assume That All Contractors Are "Pretty Much The Same"

All contractors are certainly *not* the same. In over 20 years of researching and solving home comfort and indoor air quality problems, and working with contractors literally around the world, the researchers and trainers with Comfort Institute have witnessed an enormous variation in heating and air contractor competence and ethics.

Sad to say, a small minority are downright dishonest. Both NBC's Dateline and CBS's 48 Hours TV investigative news-magazines recently aired hidden camera sting operations exposing fraudulent heating-cooling contractors. A number of the companies they called out either bent the facts, or committed outright fraud on national television. The Better Business Bureau ranks heating and cooling as one of the highest complaint generating industries.

Fortunately, the great majority of contractors are honest. They work hard, and mean well. *Unfortunately*, most simply

don't have the business systems in place to properly serve the consumer.

Even though they are honest, most companies don't invest enough in initial and ongoing staff training. They are usually behind the times when it comes to diagnosing problems with today's more complicated furnaces and air conditioners. Most simply aren't aware of all the common defects with duct systems and house insulation that affect your comfort and indoor air quality. Many residential service companies don't pay high enough wages or offer sufficient benefits to attract the best people. Few have all the state of the art tools and diagnostic instruments needed to do the job right.

This run of the mill contractor can be expensive to use. You are certain to end up paying for excessive utility bills resulting from inefficient operation of your new system. Your new system may also not last as long as it could. And you run the risk of frequent call backs to try to get the system to deliver the comfort you had hoped for.

Fortunately, there *are* some contractors who are ethical, technically at the leading edge, and also have business and customer service systems in place that ensure high levels of client satisfaction. Invest the time to identify a good contractor. It will be time well spent.

Don't Choose A "Fly-By-Night" Contractor

Heating and air conditioning is without a doubt the most complex home service trade. You cannot risk having an amateur or a dishonest contractor install your new equipment. For your safety, choose a contractor that has some substance. Ask all prospective contractors:

- ✓ How many years has your company been in business?
- ✓ Are you registered or licensed by the state/province or city to do heating and air conditioning work?
- ✓ Do you carry both general liability and workers compensation insurance?