

## **Home Tips Everyone Can Use**

### **By Lou Prinzi, Professional Home Inspector**

**Question:** Do you recommend having the HVAC unit serviced every year? I've lived in my home now for a few years and I don't know if changing the air filter is enough to keep the system running efficiently.

**Answer:** Routine maintenance can make a big difference in the life and effectiveness of an HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) system, as well as the cost to maintain a comfortable and healthy home. Hiring a professional HVAC contractor to inspect and service the unit is recommended. Typically, this type of maintenance is performed twice per year. Most HVAC companies charge an up front fee for their maintenance plans and then schedule your twice yearly visits. Prices and plans vary so check around.

Moving parts in the HVAC system can be lubricated for better operation, reducing energy use and costs. Evaporator and condenser air conditioning coils can be cleaned and air conditioner refrigerant levels can be checked and adjusted.

Homeowners also can extend the life of their system by staying on top of filter maintenance by inspecting, cleaning or changing filters every month during the heavy-use summer and winter months. A dirty filter will slow down air flow and make the system work harder to condition the air, wasting energy. A clean filter will also prevent dust and dirt from building up in the system which could lead to expensive maintenance and/or early system failure.

Filters must be installed properly, but they are often installed improperly and frequently get sucked into the blower. Washable filters should be washed and treated every month. Use a filter that is recommended by the manufacturer and replace it according to the manufacturer's instructions. The filter is typically located on the return duct side of the air handler and most disposable filters have an arrow stamped on the edge to indicate the direction of air travel through the filter. Be sure to check for the arrow, and install them correctly.

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