

From the Desk of ...

Anthony Gemma, Esq.

Let's talk about appreciation. It's a pretty versatile word. For example, our appreciation of you choosing us for your heating and cooling needs never lessens. We know you have choices, and when you call us, you put your trust in our ability to be on time, fix or maintain your system, and advise you when it's time to



replace a furnace, heat pump, or central air conditioning unit. We continually try to earn your trust by being prompt, capable, professional, and honest.

Another way to look at appreciation is the increasing value of your home. Whether you're planning to stay where you live forever or anticipate a move, taking care of it is vital. This issue of *For Your Comfort* is packed with articles about how you can keep the weather on the outside to prevent winter damage and, thereby, keep your home increasing in value.

My next example of appreciation deals with the knowledge-related definition of the word. We appreciate that you are capable of maintaining many aspects of your heating and cooling systems and that you appreciate the situations when a job is better left to a professional.

And finally, we appreciate your business. Thank you. ■

Stay Cozy This Winter

Does your vision of a perfect winter day include relaxing in your cozy home watching the gently falling snow decorate the landscape while the kids build a snowman in the yard? Sounds like a Currier and Ives scene, doesn't it? And it sounds a lot better than fighting drafts, turning up the temperature, and worrying if your furnace will last the season.

If you take action this fall and perform a few easy preventive measures, the chance of the first scenario coming true improves greatly.

First, identify your home's air leaks. You probably already know where they are. The door that you put towels against to block the air – the window that admitted blowing snow – the rooms that seemed colder than the rest of the house last winter.



Get out your caulking gun, screwdriver, and duct tape:

- Use heavy duty caulking around gaps in your attic or crawl space and in your basement where the walls meet the floor. Use insulating foam if you can see daylight.
- Use paintable caulk around window frames, sills, and doors. If you're careful, no one will ever see it. If you're in a hurry, peel-off caulk will work, and you can remove it next spring.
- Insulate your attic fan ducts to prevent back-dripping and ice accumulation.
- Weather-strip drafty doors and windows. If you have storm doors and windows, apply weather-stripping.
- Install foam gaskets on all exterior wall electrical outlets. They're cheap, and they work.
- Seal loose joints and gaps in your furnace duct system. This is also your chance to clean all the dust from the top.
- Remove any window air conditioning units and store them for the winter. If this isn't possible, encase them in fiberglass insulation, and seal them with polyethylene sheeting and duct tape.

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Desire to Keep Warm Increases Fire Risks

Trying to augment your furnace may sound like a good idea on the surface, but has some pretty dangerous consequences unless you take precautions.

Space heaters are a common quick-fix idea, and they're probably the most dangerous. Two out of three winter fires and three out of every four deaths are caused by space heaters.

Fireplaces are often used for supplemental heat. Actually they do the opposite. When lit, they draw the warm air that is inside up and out through your chimney and make your furnace work harder. But a crackling fire on a cold winter night is also good for your soul. Just make sure you have it checked out and cleaned before you use it. The damper should be tight. Close it, and look up through your chimney. If you see daylight, have it fixed.

Hire a chimney sweep to remove any obstructions such as bird's nests and thoroughly clean the flue. Creosote is an unavoidable by-product that builds up in wood burning fireplaces and can catch fire.

If you use artificial logs, burn only one at a time. They're made of wax and sawdust and may explode if used in multiples. Never burn pressure-treated wood. It contains toxic chemicals that can make you sick. And of course, never leave a lit fireplace unattended.

Wood-burning stoves need close attention.

Follow the manufacturer's directions, and never burn coal in a wood-burning stove. Never start your fire with gasoline or any other liquid fuel. Don't burn artificial logs – the intense heat can cause them to flash and explode. Don't burn pressure treated wood. Keep in mind that wood-burning stoves require the same maintenance as fireplaces, so check the damper and vents and have them cleaned annually.

Gas and electric furnaces that haven't been used in several months will most likely have a layer of dust on the heating elements. If you smell something odd after firing it up, it's just the dust burning off, and it's not harmful. It might take a few days to fully burn off, so it's a good idea to clean your furnace first after it has been idle.

Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are as necessary to today's homes as your furnace. Test your smoke detectors monthly, and if you don't have a carbon monoxide detector on every floor of your house, we recommend you have them installed. Carbon monoxide is a deadly, odorless, tasteless gas that your body absorbs 200 times faster than oxygen. Gas fireplaces, stoves, barbecues, propane appliances, and automobiles are possible sources around the house. Don't risk it – at best, it will make you sick – at worst, it will kill you – and there are no warning signs other than a mechanical detector. ■

Stay Cozy This Winter

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- Make sure your fireplace damper fits tight and will stay closed when it's not being used. Consider installing glass doors if you don't already have them. Turn down the thermostat when you use your fireplace.
- Wrap your water heater tank with a thermal blanket. They're available at most hardware stores and home centers.
- Close the curtains or blinds on cold winter nights. Open them on sunny days.

When it comes to your furnace, the smartest winter investment might be the money you spend this fall on a professional furnace tune-up.

We'll clean your furnace, check all the parts for wear, replace them if needed, and lubricate the motor and fan. Give us a call, and schedule a tune-up before the cold weather sets in.

As much as we enjoy your company, you can maintain your own furnace between our twice-a-year visits. Your furnace will last longer, use less fuel, and run quieter.

- Clean and/or replace the filters regularly – every 30 days during the winter.
- Use your body's energy system at night and when you're active. Turn down the thermostat before bed and during the day when you're doing household chores. Consider installing a programmable thermostat to match the heat to your schedule.
- Set your water heater thermostat at 120°F. Why pay to heat water above what you need?
- Consider installing reversible ceiling fans. They push the warm air that collects at the ceiling back down in the winter and help circulate cool air in the summer.

Now you're set. Grab that book or remote control and enjoy the beauty of winter – but first, make some hot chocolate. ■

The Facts About Indoor Air Quality

The poor quality of indoor air is a subject that has grabbed a lot of headlines over the past few years. Toxic mold, radon, and carbon monoxide lead the list of topics – and rightfully so – they all present serious health hazards unless you take steps to detect and eliminate their sources. As a homeowner, you need to be vigilant about all substances that threaten the air you and your family breathe.

Once you've read this article, take a few minutes to look around your house to see if you're at risk. If you find any of the culprits mentioned, take action.

Mold and biological pollutants

Today's modern houses are built with efficient air conditioners and furnaces and don't rely on open windows to circulate the air as in older homes. This "tightness" keeps bills down but can increase the likelihood of creating a breeding ground for mold and other biological pollutants. A tiny leak behind a wall or trapped moisture can turn into a serious problem for your health and your wallet.

Mold and dust mites thrive in high humidity. Mold grows on organic materials such as paper, grease, dirt, soap scum, and textiles, and it migrates through the air to start new colonies. Dust mites live in textiles – usually your carpeting. If you notice an odd odor and can't find its source or suffer from watery eyes, runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, itching, coughing, wheezing, or experience chronic headaches, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, or shortness of breath, you probably have a mold or dust mite infestation, or both. Act immediately, and call in a professional.

Prevention is always the best step. To keep mold from getting a foothold, keep bathrooms, basements, crawl spaces, and sink cabinets dry and clean. Use disinfectant to clean surface mold, and if your carpet(s) get wet, act fast to have them dried and cleaned. Clean and disinfect humidifiers, dehumidifiers, and air conditioning condensers regularly. Keep humidity levels at 50 percent or less and make sure moisture-prone areas are well-ventilated. Dust mite infestations can be reduced with a high efficiency filter vacuum or central vacuum system. However, if someone in your house is sensitive to dust mites, you may have to replace your carpets.

Radon

The only way to know if you're at risk is to have your home tested. Radon is a gas that decays into radioactive particles when uranium breaks down. What you may not know is that uranium is present in most of the world's soil and rocks. If your house is adjacent to exposed soil or rocks, or constructed with natural stone or rock, you may be at risk. Exposure to radon increases the risk of lung cancer.

If you suspect a problem, we recommend you have your house tested for radon by a professional. Your county extension office or state health department can help you learn more.

Carbon Monoxide

A carbon monoxide detector can save your life. Have them installed on every level of your house. Carbon monoxide is created when fuels don't burn completely. Improperly working furnaces and water heaters are the main culprits, but cracked or rusted heat exchangers, blocked vents, fireplace flues, and fuel-burning stoves can also be responsible. Your heating system should be checked annually to assure all the combustible fuel is being burned. Never operate fuel-burning space heaters, gas ranges, ovens, and grills without proper ventilation.

Other dangers

The average home is full of other sources that can affect the quality of indoor air and your health. Solvents, paint, strippers, wood preservatives, pesticides, aerosol sprays, automotive products, hobby supplies, some cleaners, and disinfectants are the most common. Use them only for their intended purpose, always keep them in their original container with the label intact, and store them in a clean, dry, well-ventilated area. ■



**FREE
Placement
of
Indoor Air
Quality
(IAQ)
monitor in
your house
(a \$99 value)**

Program Your Comfort Level

By Rick Pizard - Sales & Service Director



If you've set your coffee pot to start brewing when you wake up or timed your yard sprinkler to operate at optimum times, then why not have your house adjust the temperature to fit your schedule.

Yep, we're talking about programmable thermostats. They assure your comfort and save on energy bills. The newest generation can store six or more settings per day, different settings for workdays and weekends and adjust heating and air conditioning as the outside temperature changes – they just keep getting better.

There are five types to choose from:

Electromechanical thermostats are the least sophisticated and will not work with heat pumps. They store the same setting for every day.

Digital thermostats allow for precise climate control and custom programming. The only drawback we find is some are complicated to program.

Hybrid thermostats combine digital technology with manual slides and knobs for ease of use.

Occupancy thermostats maintain the setback temperature you select until someone presses a button. They are the ultimate in simplicity, but the least flexible.

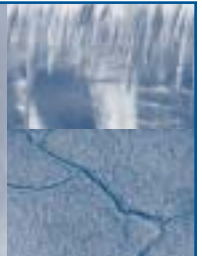
Year 'round comfort and lower energy bills – what could be better? Give us a call and we'll help you chose the one that best fits your lifestyle. ■

A Tradition of Service

We are committed to providing our customers with the best service at the best price. Our focus is honesty and fairness. We only recommend and perform services you truly need. Furthermore, we only deal with quality vendors and suppliers to make sure any equipment we install is guaranteed to perform as expected. We guarantee your satisfaction every time. *We want your business for life.*

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Thank you for your business.

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