

AC Maintenance

Doing proper maintenance on your home's air conditioner will ensure that your system is operating as efficiently as possible. It helps to improve your home's air quality, and it can save a lot of grief. A well maintained system has a much longer operating life. Proper maintenance will also lower your energy consumption during the warm months of the year.

You likely will want to hire a licensed HVAC technician to perform the following key jobs each year.

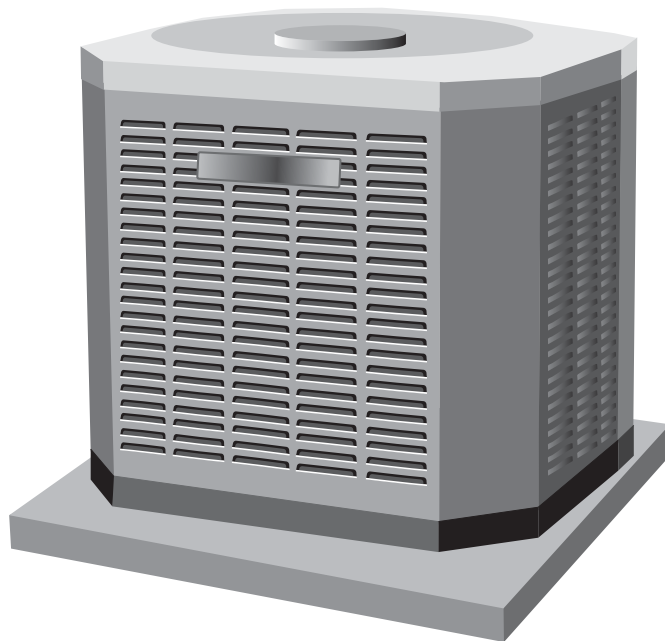
Central air units

Check the refrigerant level.

The common refrigerant brand name is Freon. If your system is running low, it will not provide maximum cooling. There is also a test that your technician can do to confirm whether Freon is leaking out of your system.

Inspect both the indoor and outdoor coils.

The coils look similar to the metal fins on your car radiator. If the coils are dirty, a cleaning job involves turning off the power at the disconnect or breaker, gently spraying on a coil cleaner (soapy water is usually adequate) and then using a hose to spray off the cleaner with a gentle stream of water. Never use a pressure washer or intense rinse as this will bend the fins of the coil, damaging your unit. If the technician does the job right, your unit will be free of the dirt and dust that cause it to work extra hard.



Check supply and return air temperatures.

There should be at least 18 degrees of difference from the air coming out of your registers and the air going into your HVAC system returns. Without that difference, your AC unit will run extra long and that will increase your bill. You can check the air temperature by holding a thermometer inside a register supplying cool, conditioned air, and then holding the thermometer inside a return register.

Inspect your ducts for leaks.

Most ducts leak 30 percent of a home's heating and cooling. To fix that, simply apply a substance called mastic with a paintbrush to every duct seam or apply foil tape to the seams. Do not use what is commonly referred to as "duct tape" because this material will quickly dry out and will not stick to ductwork.

Other key steps.

Always change your filters, vacuum your registers and vents, and keep all vegetation trimmed away from your outside unit.

Window units

Clean the filter.

Unplug the unit and remove it from its case. Remove the filter from the grill. Clean the filter with a vacuum or warm soapy water. Do this every-other-week during hot weather.

Clean the coils.

Clean the dirt and grime off the coils using a spray cleaner. Avoid getting any water on electrical

components, and only use a gentle spray when rinsing off the cleaner.

Make sure the unit drains properly. When you return the unit to the window, make sure it's slightly tilted downward on the outside so the condensation can drain.

Conclusion

A homeowner who takes the time and care to do annual maintenance will have a system that functions better, lasts longer and uses less energy.

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