

ENERGY EFFICIENCY



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SCOTT'S ENERGY SPOT: FEELING LUCKY?

Don't gamble with HVAC maintenance

While luck may be a good option for the horse track, it is not the best idea for your HVAC system.

In a recent survey conducted by the HVAC equipment manufacturer Duraplas, 50% of those polled were choosing to

rely on luck this summer by skipping regular maintenance on their air-conditioning system.

In these tough economic times, some of Firelands Electric's members may also be considering this option to save some money. While this may seem like a good idea in the short term, it could end up costing a great deal in the long run — through both higher monthly utility bills and HVAC equipment failure.

HVAC maintenance may seem like an unnecessary expense when high prices are putting the squeeze on your monthly budget, but simple maintenance and updates can often be completed by members for minimal cost and just a small investment of time.

Low cost ways to win big

Regular filter changes are one of the easiest and most effective maintenance tasks but are often overlooked until cool air stops blowing from the vents. Unfortunately, by the time this occurs, it may be too late. A lack of airflow across the indoor coil can cause liquid refrigerant to travel to the compressor, ruining it as quickly as a bad hand at the casino.

According to HVAC filter manufacturers Permatron and Airbear, a dirty filter can increase summer cooling bills by 30% to 60%. Clogged filters force your air-conditioning system to run continuously and seriously affect the unit's cooling performance. This can be easily avoided by regularly spending ten minutes to replace a \$4 to \$40 filter.

While in the basement changing the filter, members should also inspect the air distribution system. Look for gaps and loose metal on the supply and return

sheet metal trunk (the main conduit of the HVAC system), as well as on the ductwork. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the average HVAC ductwork leaks enough air through gaps and holes to reduce the system's overall efficiency by 30% or more. These areas can be sealed easily with a heat-resistant caulk, aluminum foil tape (don't use duct tape), and my personal favorite, brushable duct mastic. All three are available online or at any area hardware store. For an investment of only \$10 to \$50, members can increase their HVAC efficiency and their home's comfort level.

The outside condensing unit of your air conditioner is another area that could also benefit from a periodic visual inspection. The U.S. DOE advises that a layer of dirt, grass clippings, or cottonwood the thickness of only a dime can increase utility bills by preventing the condensing unit from moving heat from the home to the outdoors. This causes the air-conditioning system to run continuously while also providing little to no cool air. The layer of dirt can be removed by shutting the power off to the outdoor unit and using a garden hose, compressed air, or a soft brush and shop vac to remove the debris. Don't apply too much force though, because it can damage the cooling fins of your unit.

Firelands Electric's members do not have to rely on luck to save money on their utility bills this summer. Tips, DIY instructions, and other helpful links are available on our website at www.firelandsec.com/energy-education. And, I'm always happy to provide members with a free, one-on-one energy efficiency consultation. To schedule your free consult, contact the members services department at 1-800-533-8658 or at members@firelandsec.com.