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2002

How Can I Prepare My Furnace For Summer Vacation?

Stephen Poe

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Recommended Citation

Poe, Stephen, "How Can I Prepare My Furnace For Summer Vacation?" (2002). *All Archived Publications.* Paper 283.
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A weekly question/answer column

How Can I Prepare My Furnace For Summer Vacation?

Stephen Poe answers:*

Servicing your heating equipment at least once a year could reduce your fuel bill up to 20 percent or more, and could save you the discomfort and expense of equipment breakdowns during the next winter heating season. It could also save your life. Carbon monoxide poisoning and fires associated with malfunctioning furnaces take many lives each year. Consider these tips so your heating system will be in top shape when you turn it on next fall.

- Always cut power to the heating system before you start maintenance work. Since systems vary from one manufacturer to the next, consult your owner's manual for specific instructions. If you doubt your ability to safely perform these tasks, call a professional.
- Inspect heating ducts annually for leaks, and repair them with a quality duct tape. Heating ducts and water or steam pipes that pass through unheated areas should be covered with duct insulation or unfaced R-11 insulating batts or blankets. If the ducts are also used for air conditioning, use faced insulation and place the vapor barrier on the outside to prevent condensation on the duct.
- Inspect chimneys, flues, and flashing for loose bricks and mortar, cracked linings and leaks. Prompt repairs should be made since safety is of primary concern.
- Clean and change the furnace filter. Keeping clean filters in your furnace will pay off in fuel savings. Check furnace filters every two months during the heating season, and put a fresh one in now so your furnace will be ready to run in the fall.
- Check the exhaust vent and clear any obstructions. Inspect the blower motor with the power off. If the owner's manual calls for it, oil the motor. Inspect the V-belt and pulleys for wear, and adjust the belt if it moves more than an inch.
- Clean accumulated dirt from the furnace and around it. Dust on radiators, baseboard heating units or in ducts acts as an insulation and can waste heat. Vacuum them regularly.
- Never store or stack anything around or on your furnace. Keep the thermostat clean. Have your system checked periodically by a heating professional.

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* Stephen Poe is Utah State University Extension Energy Specialist