

***Everything You Must Know Before
Hiring an HVAC Company***

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What is HVAC?

If it's the first time you've run into problems, or needed to install a new HVAC system, you might be wondering just what it is, and what all it entails. HVAC stands for 'heating, ventilation, and air conditioning,' or simply, climate control. And if you don't have a system in place or are having problems with your current system, it will create a problem you'll notice right away.

Stagnant air that sits at uncomfortable temperatures, and creates hot spots in some rooms and cold spots in others, are just a few of the problems that you could run into with your HVAC system if it's not installed properly or if it breaks down. Other, less noticeable, problems that your HVAC system could cause you are things such as energy loss – an HVAC system that runs inefficiently will use more energy than needed and that energy will be wasted. Therefore, the money you pay in monthly bills will be too.

Hiring an HVAC contractor is not an option if you own an HVAC system; these are simply not jobs for even the most talented and knowledgeable DIY-er. The trick is to know which HVAC company is going to be the right one for you and give you the best HVAC system for your needs.

HVAC Repairs

HVAC companies differ from other kinds of companies in that when you phone one for repairs, it does work a bit differently than when you phone one to install an entirely brand new system. If you're installing an entirely new HVAC system in your home or office, you'll need to do much more research before hiring one, because it will be a much bigger job. Also, HVAC companies charge differently for the initial visit when it comes to installing new, and repairing an existing system.

When you're installing an entirely new system, HVAC companies want to be the ones to do it, because it's a big job and they'll make a large profit from it. Because of that, they'll most likely come visit your property for free and give you a free bid. However, that is not the case when you phone a contractor or company to come repair your existing HVAC system. Because it's likely to be a smaller job, the companies will most likely charge you to come have a look at the property. And because of that, you'll need to approach things a little bit differently.

When you first phone around to different HVAC companies, make sure that you call at least three to tell them about the problem you're having. Be prepared to give as much detail as possible when describing your problem to help them best assess your situation and what the solution is.

Ask each company what they'll charge to come out and look at the problem. Make sure that you get a detailed explanation of what service charges there will be, what the service call will entail, and what the technician will do while they're there.

Once an HVAC technician comes out to the property for the initial service call, you'll most likely be able to base your decision on which company you liked best, which company felt offered the most options for your problems, and price. Once you've decided which company to hire to make the repair, you won't be able to hire them right on the spot, unless it's a very minor repair. There are still a few things you'll need to make sure you do.

The first is to make sure that before the job, you get a full estimate stating what work needs to be done, what parts will need to be replaced, any warranties and guarantees those new parts have, and any labor costs that will also be included in the final price. Also have the company agree in the estimate to leave you with any replaced parts. This is simply a good faith gesture, and shows that you won't be paying to replace parts that don't need replacing.

Lastly, you'll need to make sure that your final invoice for the repair includes certain things. Some of those are: the initial problem before you called for the repair; an itemized list of all the parts that were replaced; a total amount of labor hours and what was done during those hours.

Of course, whether you're calling for repairs or calling to have an entire system installed brand new, you'll need to make sure that anything you have done is covered under warranty and that you have all of that paperwork before bidding your final adieu to the HVAC company.

Calling an HVAC company for a repair may not be as detailed as calling one to install a whole new system, and you may find some aspects of it easier. However, to make sure that the work is done right and that you won't need to call the company back again any time soon, you'll still need to do your homework to make sure you're getting the right HVAC company for the job.

Installing New: Where to Start Looking

Finding an HVAC company to entirely replace an HVAC system, or install one new is much different than finding one to fix a problem with your current HVAC system; this is for a few different reasons. The first is that you'll need to know things such as the sizing of your HVAC system. When an HVAC system is repaired, it's often just a matter of matching compatible pieces and replacing those that are broken with those that are new. But when you're starting from scratch, all of those specifications need to be figured out and determined by the HVAC company.

Another way that hiring an HVAC company to install a new company differs from hiring one to make repairs is in how they price. While HVAC repairs might have hard and firm pricing, even if it can't be determined right away over the phone, you have quite a bit of negotiating room when it comes to the price of a new system.

Because there are many different things to consider when installing a new HVAC system, there are also many different things you need to research when looking for one. First though, you need to know where to start.

The best place you could start looking for an HVAC company is through people you know. Ask your friends and family if they've ever needed to hire an HVAC company. If they have, ask them who they hired and if they were happy with the work they did. Other people to ask might be your neighbors, as they'll have a better idea of what companies are in the area, and how good those companies are.

Other than referrals from people you know, the next best referral is from someone you don't – professional contractor associations. There are lots of organizations and associations that are dedicated to helping people find legitimate, reputable, and professional help when they need it, and most of them have websites. All you have to do is go online and look up the association – you'll have a full list of HVAC company names in your area in minutes. The Air Conditioner Contractors of America (ACAA) and the Plumbing Heating Cooling Contractors Association (PHCC) are just two that exist specifically for HVAC companies.

If you need even more professional referrals to find an HVAC company, check online or at your local Better Business Bureau. The BBB is nationwide and if a complaint has ever been filed against any HVAC company that you're considering, you'll find it here. As well, the BBB will also have a full listing of HVAC companies that they have found to be reputable.

Lastly of course, if you're having a really hard time just getting a list of names of HVAC companies, check your local Yellow Pages. This is always a good place to at least gather a few names; and wherever you get the names from, you're going to do a little more research than that anyway, so it couldn't hurt.

Narrowing Down the List

Once you have a list of at least five different HVAC companies, it's time to start narrowing down that list to find the one that's right for you. There are a few steps you can take to drop the deadweight right away, and focus on the companies that really have some potential.

Call after Hours

If your new (or newly repaired) HVAC system breaks down in the middle of the night, you shouldn't have to try and sleep in sub-zero temperatures, or swelter under intense heat either. It's extremely important that any HVAC company that works for you is available when you need them. Most say they are available after hours, but finding one that's true to their word can sometimes be difficult when you're trying to find help at 11pm. Do your research before you hire by calling the office (or customer help number) sometime after hours. If they answer, that's a good sign.

Look up Reviews of the Companies Online

Online product reviews are *huge* these days, and you can find a review for just about anything – including reviews on HVAC companies! These reviews may give you the best idea of whether or not a company is professional and provides quality work. Just always make sure that the reviews you find are on third-party sites, and not the contractor's own website.

Ask about Insurance

Every reputable and legitimate contractor will have Workman's Compensation insurance just in case they, or someone that works for them, become injured on your property while completing the work. To protect yourself, you must ask if the contractor has this type of insurance before they begin.

Another type of insurance that HVAC companies absolutely need to have is liability insurance. This is in case the workers damage your property while they're doing the job, and it's another piece of documentation that you cannot compromise on.

Ask to see Certification

All HVAC companies are required to hold state certification. This certification requires them to attend regular training and courses, as well as carry liability insurance (so if you go through this step, you can assume that they have it and not require them to show it to you.) Making sure that HVAC companies are certified by the state is another non-negotiable when you're looking for the *right* HVAC company.

Make sure they do proper load calculations

When a proper load calculation is done, it means that an HVAC company comes in to inspect the property and most importantly, size the area that will house the HVAC system. Many companies try to cut corners by neglecting this step and just installing what was there prior to the new system or even worse, making a guesstimate.

An HVAC system that is not properly sized will cost you greatly in the long run. It could mean that you're wasting energy and therefore, paying too much every single month on your utility bills; or it could mean that you have some rooms that are the perfect temperature with the perfect air flow, while others are hot and stuffy and others are freezing. *Having an HVAC system that's of the proper size is the most important element when installing a new one!* Although you don't need to ask the company to come in, inspect, and make a proper load calculation before you've even hired them, you do need to make sure that they make these measurements on every single job they do.

Getting the Right Equipment

The most important element of your new HVAC system is going to be the actual equipment that's used to install it, so you need to know a little bit about that equipment before you decide which kind to use, and what HVAC contractor to hire to install it. But that doesn't mean that you need to know the ins and outs of every different kind of HVAC equipment either. You just have to know what to look for, and what questions to ask.

What's the capacity?

The capacity of a furnace or air conditioning system is measured in BTUs and it will tell you how often your furnace will run and how much output it will have. A professional HVAC contractor will be able to tell you what capacity you need, or what is best for your situation. The capacity of your system is directly related to how large it is, and we've already discussed how important that is. It's equally important that you deal with an HVAC company that knows the proper capacity you require.

What's the sound level?

While you may not think that the noise coming from your HVAC system will be a big deal, you'll soon change your mind once you can't hear yourself over the racket in the backyard, or can't sleep with that constant noise in the basement. If it's a furnace that you're installing, there is unfortunately no real rating system to go by to determine how loud it is. In this case, you'll need to rely on your contractor and trust their knowledge. Make sure though, that you get a sound estimate in writing so that if it becomes really bad, you'll be able to return it or get it fixed under warranty.

Air conditioners work a little bit differently. These units do have a rating for sound; a rating of 0 means that the sound is barely audible while a sound of 13 is extremely loud and shows that the air conditioner truly will be disruptive – to you and your neighbors, most likely.

The sound rating for air conditioners is measured in bels (much like decibels) and a 9-bel rating can be ten times louder than an air conditioner with an 8-bel rating; so don't settle for one that's one bel lower just because you want to save on price, it really will make a big difference! Normally, air conditioners have anywhere between an 8-bel and 9-bel sound rating, but you can find units as quiet as 6.8 bels.

What's the energy efficiency?

Of course, making sure that your furnace or air conditioner is energy efficient will mean that you save money on your energy bills and that you're helping the environment at the same time too. But how can you know that you're getting an energy efficient unit?

The energy efficiency of furnaces and air conditioners are also measured differently from each other. Furnaces are given a measurement of Annual Fuel Utilization Efficiency (AFUE.) The higher a furnace's AFUE rating, the more energy efficient it is. Most new furnaces have an AFUE rating of 78 to 97.

Air conditioners on the other hand, have their energy efficiency measured by the Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (SEER.) The average SEER for newer air conditioners is anywhere from 13 to 21 and again, the higher the rating, the more energy efficient the unit is.

Heating pumps, another area of HVAC systems that you may need to have replaced, also come with an energy efficiency rating. In heating mode, a heat pump's energy efficiency measurement is taken with a Heating Season Performance Factor (HSPF.) Again, the higher the better; and today's heat pumps have an HSPF of anywhere from 7.7 to 10.

Remember that when you're speaking to any HVAC company about your different requirements, they should have several different models of systems, and they should have at least two or three that are within your budget. Ask them to go through the different brands and types of equipment and thoroughly discuss with you all the pros and cons of each unit. You'll be living with this piece of equipment for a very long time so it's important that you're comfortable with it and that you know as much as possible about it.

There are some standards in the industry regarding the different makes of the equipment. American Standard is the best brand name, while Lennox, York, and Trane are also very good options. Some brands that have proven to be not as good are: Goodman, Carrier, Air Flo, Coleman, Rheem, and Maytag.

How Much Will it Cost?

No one, not even the most reputable or the most professional company, will be able to give you a price for an entire new HVAC system over the phone. That being said, there are some generalizations that you can base your final decision on, as well some things to consider when it comes to the price of your system. One of those is that price should never be the biggest factor in your decision when hiring an HVAC company. While everyone wants to get a good deal, you'll probably gladly pay a few extra dollars now in exchange for running into big problems with your system later.

In a small home, one that's 1,500 square feet or under, the cost of installing even just one part of an HVAC system can cost anywhere from \$3,000 - \$9,000. In larger homes, the price could go up as high as \$15,000, depending on exactly what's needed and the total size of the home. Other factors will come into play when the cost of your system is determined as well. These will include things such as the age of the home, if there's existing duct work in place, and the type and brand of equipment that's being installed.

It's important to remember, especially when you're discussing the different equipment options with contractors, that the actual equipment only accounts for about 1/3 of the total cost of any HVAC system; labor costs will account for the other 2/3 of the cost.

One thing you should always ask your HVAC contractor about is any rebates or tax breaks that you'll be eligible for. Some state governments, as well as many manufacturers, offer these when you invest in an energy-efficient appliance. They do this to encourage better environmental care and to decrease the amount of pollutants being put into the air.

Lastly, always remember that the first time an HVAC contractor comes out to look at your home and its needs, that visit should always be free. You're about to make a very big investment, and good HVAC companies will understand that you need to look at all your options. And they won't charge you for doing it.

Negotiating with the Contractor

Unlike many other types of contracting jobs, you can negotiate the price with an HVAC contractor. HVAC companies are very used to this and usually won't hesitate to give a bit of a discount, even it's only \$50 or \$100 – but you'll still feel like you're giving a deal. If you need to get even more than that off the final cost of your unit, there are a few ways that you can try to negotiate a better price.

If the contractor is talking up a model that is out of your price range, simply tell them that. If they're a good contractor, they're going to have at least one other model that they can show you that might be a little more affordable. And, if the model they're talking about has certain features that you like, but other models don't come with it, ask if they'd be willing to give you a price reduction for that model. The worst they can say is 'no.'

If the contractor really seems hesitant to give you a discount, but you really need one, there are still a few things you can do to try and get a better deal. Ask the contractor if they'll cut you a deal if you sign onto a service contract with them. Many HVAC companies try to get their customers to sign this type of agreement anyway, because it means extra profit for them over a longer period of time. While generally, you don't need these types of service contracts, signing up for one could save you a good deal of money on your initial investment.

You could also ask for a discount if you're willing to let the contractor decide when it is installed. This of course, can only be done if the outdoor climate is not currently extreme and you can live in your home without heating or cooling for a little while. You also need to make sure that the contractor still gives you a firm date on when the unit will be installed. Just because you're willing to negotiate on the date doesn't mean that you have to be at the contractor's mercy either.

One more negotiating point you can offer up is on how you pay. Tell the contractor that you're willing to pay in cash, or offer better payment terms, in exchange for a discount on the final cost. Many contractors will see this as instant cash, and will be more than happy to take the deal.

Remember that while many contractors are open to negotiations on price, it's also important to not be too aggressive. If you get the feeling that the contractor really doesn't want to give you a better price, stop asking for one. And if the price is still much too much for you to afford, find a contractor that can give you the price you're looking for.

Questions to Ask any HVAC Contractor

When it comes to finding the right HVAC contractor for you, you'll find out what kind of company you're dealing with best by the questions you ask and more importantly, the answers to them. Here's an extensive list of questions that will get you started. Of course, you'll most likely have many of your own to add to it!

Do you have a state license?

Covered earlier, you cannot work with a contractor who is not licensed by the state.

How long have you been in business under this name?

If a contractor has been in business for a long time, it's a good sign that they're a professional company with many happy clients. Be sure to ask if they've held the same business name for that entire time. If they've had a complaint against them and simply dealt with it by starting a new business under a new business name, it won't do you much good and it's a good sign that they're not a reputable company.

Do you have three references you can give me?

You've already asked about licensing and credentials when you first phoned the HVAC contractor. Now you need to ask about the other referrals that will tell you whether or not the company is worth hiring – their past customers! Ask for at least three names and phone numbers. When you contact the reference, make sure you ask what the person did/did not like about the company, and if they would use the company again.

Does the quoted price include federal, state, and local taxes?

Remember, you're going to be paying thousands of dollars for your HVAC system, and the taxes on that could be even more thousands of dollars. And if that total doesn't include taxes and you're not prepared for it, you may find that you're unable to pay for your new HVAC system. It's much better to know this ahead of time, before the system is installed, so that you can make another choice, if necessary.

Do you offer written estimates?

In many states, it's against the law for the company to charge you more than a certain percentage over the original estimate. It's for this reason that it's so critical to get one, but there are many other good reasons too. Make sure that your estimate includes how long the work will take to get done, what work exactly will be done, and the type of equipment that will be installed.

Will the payment terms be outlined in the contract?

You don't want to negotiate out payments and payment terms with the contractor only to have it all blown out of the water anyway when the contract is finally drawn up. Make sure that any agreed upon payment terms will be put into the contract, so that the contractor is bound by them just as you are.

Can I hold back one-third of the payment until work is completed and approved by me?

It's very common in the HVAC world for customers to hold back a portion of the payment until the work is completed. This is your good faith money so that you can be assured that the work will be done to your liking. Because 2/3 of the total cost is for labor and not equipment, most contractors won't have a problem with this arrangement, and it could be just the insurance you need.

What are the warranties on the equipment?

Any piece of any HVAC system is going to come with some sort of manufacturer's warranty. Ask to know what it is, and that you get it in writing just before the units are installed.

Are there warranties on your labor?

It's important to not only ask about warranties on the equipment, but also what warranties are on the labor. Even if the equipment is the best of the best, and never breaks down, it's still not going to operate properly if it's not properly installed. It's for this reason that you need to make sure the labor is also warranty-protected, and you need to know what that means. If the labor is protected under warranty, it means that within the first year of having it, the company will come out for any repairs, anytime of the day, any day of the week. Period.

Can I purchase additional warranty on either the parts or the labor?

Sometimes, you just want or need a little more protection than what's automatically offered. Your HVAC contractor should be willing to offer it to you.

Do you offer financing?

Because of the large amount of money that an HVAC system costs, many companies will offer financing options that will allow you to stretch out the payments over a long period of time. Many contractors even have a "free period" where payments are deferred for that time and, they also don't collect interest.

Will you be able to start within 3 business days?

Of course you want your HVAC system installed as soon as possible. While HVAC companies are busy, asking them to start within three days should give them enough time to shuffle around their schedules, if needed.

Will I get at least 24 hours notice before my equipment is installed?

While you want your equipment installed as soon as possible, you also don't want a contractor just showing up at your door unannounced. Make sure that you'll get notice, and that you find out how much notice that will be.

Will you show up at the same time every day?

Just like you don't want contractors just showing up at your door, you also don't want them showing up first thing in the morning one day, only to show up mid-afternoon the next. More importantly, you want to make sure that they'll be putting in *full* work days while they're working on your project, and not taking half days off whenever they feel like it.

Do you know the current problems in my home and how to fix them?

This question is more so that you can be sure you've told the contractor everything they need to know. Be sure you've covered your bases and of course, that the contractor knows how to address your issues.

What's the capacity, sound level, and energy efficiency of the equipment you'll install?

Again, these have been covered in-depth, but it's extremely important that you don't forget to ask!

Do you perform a proper load calculation?

Don't work with any contractor that doesn't!

Questions for HVAC Contractor – Checklist

- Do you have a State license?
- How long have you been in business under this name?
- Do you have three references you can give me?
- Does the quote include federal, state, and local taxes?
- Do you offer written estimates?
- Will the payment terms be outlined in the contract?
- Can I hold back one-third of the payment until work is completed and approved by me?
- What are the warranties on the equipment?
- Are there warranties on your labor?
- Can I purchase additional warranty on either parts or labor?
- Do you offer financing?
- Will you be able to start within 3 business days?
- Will I get at least 24 hours notice before my equipment is installed?
- Will you show up at the same time every day?
- Do you know the current problems in my home and how to fix them?
- What's the capacity, sound level, and energy efficiency of the equipment you'll install?
- Do you perform a proper load calculation?

Next Steps

Thank you again for downloading this free report. We hope that you found it useful and it has given you the information you need to help you better understand the most important things you should know before hiring any HVAC contractor.

If you would like additional assistance please contact us at:

Your contact information goes here

Recommended Resources

We know that hiring an HVAC contractor can be a very stressful. While we hope this guide has provided you with everything you need to give you the confidence in making the right decision we understand you may need further information and assistance. You can always contact us directly. In addition, we recommend these helpful resources as well.

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