

Maintenance is key to saving on heating, AC

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By **MARK ZIMMARO**
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It's hot in here. It's cold in here.

People can be pretty fussy when it comes to finding the perfect room temperature at home. And the constant changing of seasons in the Northeast can put a serious strain on heating and air-conditioning systems.

And the thought of paying extra just to keep comfortable can make people cringe — especially in a struggling economy. However, homeowners can take several steps to keep their places suitable without forking over a large portion of their paychecks.

"People really have no idea that they can save a lot of money just by maintaining their heating and air-conditioning system," said Jeffrey Smith, president of J.A. Smith Heating and Air Conditioning in Warminster. "People can get 20 to 25 percent more out of their system just by having it looked at twice a year."

Several steps can be taken to ease the stress on heating and air-conditioning systems. For instance, setting the thermostats up a little higher in the summer can save money. Operating costs increase about 3 percent to 8 percent for each degree the thermostat is lowered below 78 degrees. And in the cold months, setting thermostats a degree or two

lower — and putting on a sweater — also can save money.

Keep the system clean by changing the air filter and avoiding extensive use of exhaust fans.

Smith recommends that residents have their system checked by a professional before the summer and winter.

"There are two days that the system will most likely break down: the hottest day of the year and the coldest day of the year," he said. "And when that happens, you're going to be in some trouble. It will be a major inconvenience and there won't be any deals or rebates out there to take advantage of."

Smith said there are several deals and state rebates during non-peak seasons when heaters and air conditioners aren't being used.

"I know in our company, we don't want to see anyone laid off. We want to keep our employees busy all year round," Smith said. "To do that, we offer discounted maintenance during the offseason to keep our people working. That's when people should take advantage."

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How to keep your HVAC system in good shape

- Keep the air filter and condenser coil clean.
- Keep all doors and windows closed.
- Remove furniture and other obstructions from in front of vents and grilles.
- Avoid excessive use of exhaust fans.
- Keep sunlight out in the summer; let sunlight in during the winter.
- Insulate air ducts.
- Keep heat sources away from the thermostat in the summer so it doesn't get a false reading and work overtime.
- Have the heat and air-conditioning systems checked regularly. Twice a year is recommended by some HVAC specialists.

Source: J.A. Smith Heating and Air Conditioning in Warminster