

Proper Maintenance Means Longer Life for Heat Pumps

In another look at efficient heat pump operation, we answer more basic questions for owners about maintenance and other issues.

In last month's Ruralite, we explained staging of the auxiliary heat and the compressor, and the efficient operation of the thermostat.

One of the most-asked questions is: "Why is my heat pump steaming?"

Your heat pump, like any other refrigeration system, occasionally needs to defrost. Heat pumps today are built with an automatic defrost response from the system.

To defrost, the heat pump takes heat from the house and sends it to the outdoor unit to melt the ice. During that process, the auxiliary heat comes on to keep the unit from blowing cold air while it is in defrost mode.

You may see steam at the point where the ice is melting from the outdoor unit.

Another question asked frequently is: "My heat pump seems to run a lot. Is that OK?"

Heat pumps run much longer than conventional furnaces. This is especially true when it is very cold outside. It is nothing to worry about, unless your heat pump runs often when it is mild.

You may have noticed the air that comes out of your registers or vents is not as hot as you may be used to with your previous heating system.

To get more heat out of the energy you are buying, heat pumps and high-efficiency furnaces deliver air at cooler temperatures than other heating systems. Even if it feels a little cool, it is warmer than



the rest of the air inside your house, so it will warm the house up.

Depending on the temperature outside, the temperature of the air delivered by the heat pump will be different day-to-day and hour-by-hour. Don't worry, this is also normal operation.

It is important not to block the airflow. For heat pumps to have a long, dependable life, they must have adequate airflows through their ducts and back to the indoor unit. This means doors that close need to be undercut to facilitate airflow out of the room or vents above or in the door.

Make sure you do not restrict supply airflow by closing off air vents in the system. Leave the vents open even in rooms you may use only occasionally.

Make sure you don't cover vents with furniture or rugs.

Routine maintenance also is important. If you want to ensure a long and dependable life for your

heat pump, a few simple maintenance items such as cleaning or replacing filters will prevent expensive heat pump repairs.

Filters are designed to capture dust and dirt from air passing through the system. As the filter does its job, it becomes clogged and will begin to slow airflow. This can be fatal to a heat pump.

Heat pumps depend on adequate airflow to avoid overheating, inadequate phase change of the refrigerant and reduced efficiency, which increases heating bills.

Follow instructions in your owner's manual for the type of filter and the schedule for replacement or cleaning.

Don't leave out the filter to avoid having to change it. If you do, dust and dirt will build up on the heat pump coil and lead to expensive damage.

Just as your car needs periodic servicing to maintain its efficiency and reliability, a heat pump should have annual professional servicing.

Keep the outdoor unit breathing freely by keeping debris clear to ensure a good airflow past the coil. During the fall, be sure to keep the unit free of leaves. In winter, keep snow clear from the base of the unit.

Following these few simple tips should keep your heat pump in top shape and running efficiently, which is, after all, the reason you put one in.

For a copy of a handbook on this subject or information about the heat pump rebate Klickitat PUD offers, call the Energy Services department at (800) 548-8357, or (509) 773-7622. ■