

# WARM WISHES

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As temperatures drop day by day, you begin to realize the inevitable: Another winter is on the horizon. You may not be ready for freezing weather, but you need to make sure your furnace will be up to the challenge. This handy furnace guide will give you the advice you need to ensure you'll stay toasty until spring.

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## AVOID REPAIR DESPAIR

Let's face it. Furnaces tend to break at the worst possible time, like when it's 10 degrees outside with a houseful of guests on Christmas morning. The reason is simple: Your furnace faces the most stress during extreme conditions, so any underlying problem will likely manifest during that time. According to Stewart Unsdorfer, president of Central Heating & Air Conditioning in Richmond Heights, Ohio, it's important to pay attention to the following signs of repair now, so you can enjoy cozy family gatherings later.



### HOW MUCH?

Furnace repair costs vary widely, depending on a variety of factors. Check out [this story](#) to learn more.

## WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

Beyond the normal steady hum, pay attention to any noise that continues to grow louder. You could have a cracked or partially broken belt that may be functioning now but might break at any time. Hear a whining sound? You could have a problem with the ignition.

## TURNING THE HEAT UP

If you find yourself bumping the thermostat up a few more degrees higher than you normally would just to stay warm, it may be time to get things checked. You could have a faulty thermostat or a leak in your air ducts.

## ON AND OFF AND ON AND OFF

If your furnace turns on and off quicker than normal, a rapid cycle problem may have developed. The likely culprit: thermostat, wiring or ignition issue.

## MY HEATING BILL IS HOW MUCH?

While a huge jump may be an obvious sign, also pay attention to small but steady increases in your heating bill that are not related to a rate change. It could be a sign of a developing problem.

## BEFORE YOU CALL

Furnace not working? Make sure it's not a simple fix first. Examine the following before calling a pro:

**GAS:** Make sure you have gas flow. Check the valve at the meter. Then check the shut-off valve on your furnace.

**THERMOSTAT:** This may seem obvious, but make sure your thermostat is set to heat and not stuck in the middle.

**POWER SWITCH:** Did you know that your furnace has its own power switch? Make sure it's in the "on" position.

**PILOT LIGHT:** You may need to relight the pilot light, which can occasionally go out.

**CIRCUIT BREAKER:** If the one labeled furnace has tripped, reset it by turning the switch off and then on again.

**RESET BUTTON.** Press the reset button on your furnace. If the furnace still doesn't turn on, wait 30 minutes and press the button again.

**STILL NOTHING?** Then it's time to call an HVAC pro.



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Source: Central Heating & Air Conditioning in Richmond Heights, Ohio.

## NEED A NEW FURNACE?

Maybe your 25-year-old furnace is beyond repair. It's time to quickly shop for a new one before the temps drop too low. Here are some factors to consider before purchasing a forced-air system:

### EVALUATE EFFICIENCY

Go with the most efficient furnace you can afford. Furnace efficiency is measured in AFUE (the Annual Fuel Utilization Efficiency). A high-efficiency unit will run above 90 percent AFUE, according to the Department of Energy.

### MAKE A SPLIT DECISION

You have two main system choices: split or packaged. Split HVAC systems use an indoor unit and an outside condenser. However, if you have little indoor space, a packaged unit contains all heating and cooling components in one outdoor shell.

### GET IN THE ZONE

Uneven heating in your home? Consider a zoning system, which divides your home into zones, each controlled by a separate thermostat. Additionally, dampers within ducts can open or shut off access to different zones to help even out temperatures.

### CONSIDER THE VARIABLES

There are two types of furnace blowers – variable-speed and fixed-speed. Variable-speed blowers can be beneficial if you want premium home comfort. The speed of your blower can be changed to allow a more consistent temperature throughout.

### PAY ATTENTION TO SIZE

Your contractor should perform a Manual J load calculation to find out the system size you need (measured in BTUs or tons). This calculation takes your entire home into account – from square footage to window efficiency. Systems that are too small or too large will not heat your home properly.

Source: Frigidaire



#### RED FLAG!

If your contractor gives you a quote over the phone, without looking closely at your home, be concerned. It's hard to properly gauge size from afar.



#### HOW MUCH?

Check out our [Bluebook Pricing Guide](#) to see how much a furnace installation will cost in your area.



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### THREE WAYS TO FUEL UP

Naturally, if you already have the lines installed, it may make sense to stick with natural gas, but if you do have the option of choosing your fuel type, here's what you need to know:

**1 GAS:** Natural gas tends to be the most economical way to heat your home, especially in areas where temperatures often drop below freezing. So consider it a huge bonus if you already have lines installed.

**2 OIL OR PROPANE:** A viable alternative for people who don't have gas lines, but it requires more room for storage, is dirtier than a natural gas furnace, and can be more expensive because it depends on volatile oil prices.

**3 ELECTRICITY:** This option generally costs more. But if electricity is a must, consider a heat pump. These systems transfer heat from inside to outside and vice versa, depending on the season and typically use less electricity.

## BURNING QUESTIONS



OK, so you don't need a repair or a new furnace, but you've always wondered about something the machine does, or will that one tip you heard about really work? Well, we're here to help.

### What's that funny smell when I turn on the furnace for the first time?

When your furnace is not used for long periods of time, dust can collect on the heat exchanger and in the air ducts. When the furnace is turned on, the dust burns off and releases an odor. It is normal for dust to burn off when the heater is turned on for the first time in the winter season and not a cause for concern. This smell should disappear in a few hours.

### Does shutting vents in unused rooms improve efficiency?

At first glance, there's nothing wrong with this idea: The air has to go somewhere, so why not redirect it rather than using it to heat rooms you don't use? Actually, the air is still trying to push through closed vents, which can cause a leak in ducts that aren't sealed properly.

Newer, high-efficiency furnaces are designed to operate with your specific square footage in mind and with fans running at full speed. Closing off vents creates unexpected blockages, which forces the furnace to work harder when distributing heated air.

### How often should I get an inspection?

HVAC experts say an annual furnace inspection and service will prolong the life of the system, save energy and decrease health risks. "The manufacturers that built them all agree on this; you should get it serviced once [a year] for heating and once for cooling," says Paul Mills, owner of Air Experts Heating & Cooling in Raleigh, N.C. "Much like a car, if you ignore it, a lot more things break. You [will] extend the life of it and help prevent major breakdowns."

Some experts say 75 percent of repair calls are related to a lack of maintenance. Also, an inspection can reveal carbon monoxide leaks, which are hard to detect because the gas is colorless and odorless.

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## SPACE HEATERS

Is your furnace leaving one room colder than others, but you don't want to replace the whole unit? Warm up to the idea of using a space heater to fill the void. Here are three possibilities:

### LARGE ROOMS

Mr. Heater's 30,000 BTU Vent Free Blue Flame Natural Gas Heater, MHVFGH30NGT, stands out due to its combination of size and heat output. This gas-powered heater cranks out enough heat to fill up 750 square feet. MSRP: \$239.99

### MEDIUM ROOMS

Consider the electric Vornado VH10 Whole Room Vortex Heater, which creates airflow all through the room yet remains cool to the touch. It also puts a premium on quiet operation! MSRP \$89.99

### SMALL ROOMS

The tiny Lasko 754200 ceramic heater packs a big punch. This efficient 3 pounder fits in the palm of your hand and rings in at an average price of \$25 that's hard to beat!



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