

## ***Tips for Choosing a Heating and Cooling Contractor***

When it's time to replace your heating or cooling system, it's important to choose a company that will do a good job. But not all contractors measure up. To help you evaluate contractors and make an informed decision, we've gathered the following checklist of helpful tips:

### **Consider contractors who are licensed.**

Look for state license numbers on the contractor's business card, in ads or on the contractor's truck. If you don't see a license number, you can find out if the contractor is licensed by calling the State Mechanical Licensing Department in Lansing at 517-241-9325.

### **Confirm that the contractor is insured and bonded.**

Licensed contractors are required by state law to have insurance. Contractors should carry general liability insurance and workers' compensation insurance. Insurance may pay for the repair or replacement of your property if it is damaged by contractor negligence.

### **Ask for and check references.**

Reputable contractors should be proud of their work and happy to provide you with a list of customers. Call a few of these customers and find out if their projects went smoothly.

### **Check the Better Business Bureau or the attorney general's office.**

Contractors are not going to give you a complete list of customers—just a few satisfied ones. Wise consumers will check and see if there are any outstanding complaints against the contractor.

### **Get several estimates or bids.**

Once you've received a proposal, shop around. Get a couple more. But scrutinize the bids to ensure materials and brands comply with your request. And remember: the lowest price may not always be the best value. If a proposal sounds too good to be true, you may want to check further.

### **Insist on a written estimate.**

For the protection of all involved, get a written estimate before work begins. Good proposals include exactly what will be done, what materials will be used and an estimate of labor costs.

### **Ask about warranties.**

Reputable contractors should stand by their work. See if your contractor guarantees labor. Ask about product warranties, too, if you are getting new parts or a new system.

### **Does the contractor follow up?**

Once your system is installed, good contractors will show you how to operate it and offer you the opportunity to ask questions. They should also offer tips and maintenance information. Good contractors also service what they sell. If something goes wrong after the warranty expires, will your contractor return to repair it? Be sure to find out!

### **Determine if the contractor is EPA-certified.**

Most cooling systems contain refrigerants which can be released when your cooling system or heat pump is repaired or replaced. Since refrigerants present a risk to the ozone, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates how they're handled. Contractors who are EPA-certified can legally purchase and operate a recovery unit which captures refrigerant before it is released into the atmosphere.

### **Find out how long the contractor has been in business.**

Generally, it takes several years for contractors to become established and compile good track records.

### **Ask contractors if they are affiliated with any trade associations.**

Contractors in good standing want to keep informed of industry news and receive regular training. One way to do this is by joining trade associations. Here are some contractor trade groups:

**Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Institute (ARI); [www.ari.org](http://www.ari.org)**

**Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA); [www.acca.org](http://www.acca.org)**

**American Boiler Manufacturers Association (ABMA); [www.abma.com](http://www.abma.com)**

**American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE); [www.ashrae.org](http://www.ashrae.org)**

**Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM); [www.aham.org](http://www.aham.org)**

**Gas Appliance Manufacturers Association (GAMA); [www.gamanet.org](http://www.gamanet.org)**

**Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors National Association (SMACNA); [www.smacna.org](http://www.smacna.org)**