

# It's Fall Tune-Up Time for your Furnace

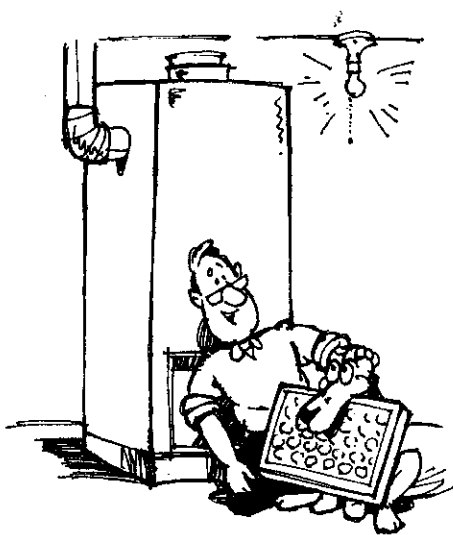
**H**eating your home typically accounts for the biggest part of your energy bill—a whopping 60%! Even if you're already using natural gas—which saves from 50 to 70% over electricity, oil or propane as a fuel\*—winter can still hit you in the pocket book. Last year, our chilly Lower Mainland winter resulted in record natural gas consumption.

Happily, by committing only a little time and money this fall, you may be able to cut your energy costs this winter. Remember—a heating system has four parts: the heating unit (furnace or boiler), distribution system (moves heat to living space), fuel, and controls (thermostat). Each can play a part in lowering your heating bills.

## What you can do:

Most furnaces operate below peak efficiency because of poor maintenance. Since proper maintenance of a heating system is the homeowner's responsibility, it's up to you. It's also simple.

- **Filters** should be changed or cleaned according to the manufacturer's directions (usually 2-3 times per year). If the filter is reusable, clean it once a month. If it's disposable, replace it when a flashlight no longer shines through. Make sure the filter is installed facing the right way!
- **Inspect fan belts** while you change the filters. Replace cracked or worn fan belts (shut off electricity first!)



*Having your furnace tuned up may be able to save you up to 20% of the operating cost of your furnace.*

- **Clean thermostat** yearly by removing the cover and carefully blowing away dust.
- **Insulate ducts** in unheated areas with fireproof insulation. Make sure cracks and joints are sealed with duct tape.
- **Vacuum air ducts and grills** regularly to keep them free of dust and lint.
- **Close off heat registers** and doors to unused rooms. **TIP:** Do not shut more than one-third of the total heat registers as this will force the furnace to cycle more frequently and more heat will be lost up the furnace vent.
- **Adjust room registers** (which should be open and clear of rugs or furniture) to direct air flow across floor.
- **Vacuum baseboards** if you have a radiant baseboard system. Vacuuming twice a year should prevent dust build-up.
- **Check to see if your furnace** has a drain or condensate catch pan. Empty the pan as required; keep pipe and drain clean and free of obstructions.
- **Consider a programmable thermostat.** These devices allow you to set your thermostat lower at night and when you're out during the day, knowing the heat will automatically be on just before you get up or return. Alternately, get into the habit of doing this manually.

## What only a qualified technician should do:

If it has been four or five years since your furnace was last serviced, contact your local natural gas contractor or look in the Yellow Pages under Heating Contractors. If you've recently renovated or moved into a new home, you might consider having the ducts cleaned also. By having your furnace serviced periodically, you may be able to save as much as

10 to 20% of your heating bill!

- **Tune-up the furnace.** A qualified technician can clean and adjust the pilot burner, main burner and the fan or blower. The same person can also perform a test to determine the combustion efficiency of your furnace and tune it to maximize its efficiency. At the very least, the bearings should be oiled every year (just a few drops!) and the belt should be checked for wear. The chimney and appliance vent system should be checked at least once a year. Every three to five years, there should be a full safety inspection.

**TIP:** If you pay for an inspection, ensure a one-year warranty is included. Ask to see the natural gas fitter's license, which should be stamped GA (gas A), GB (gas B) or GC (gas C). Ⓢ

## If your natural gas furnace will not turn on...

1. Check to see if the thermostat is set to prompt the furnace to work.
2. Check the electric circuit breaker.
3. If none of these three approaches works, call BC Gas for a service call.

**TIP:** There are almost always warning signs if a furnace is malfunctioning. Pilot light outages, 'booming' or squealing noises on ignition, delayed ignition (slow to start up), a yellow or wavering flame, excessive soot or corrosion (brown or black streaks or stains) on the furnace or vent system are the most common. Call a qualified gas contractor if you suspect your furnace isn't working properly.

## What happens if my pilot light goes out?

To relight a pilot light, follow manufacturer's instructions for the furnace (usually located on a metal plate near the furnace burner or gas controls). If it fails to relight, turn the pilot and burner off and call BC Gas or a natural gas contractor.

*\*Where BC Gas supplies natural gas, B.C. Hydro supplies electricity and others supply propane and oil as of October, 1993.*