

# DOES YOUR CONTRACTOR Know NATE?

by Harvey Black



You will probably talk to a number of contractors before having work done on your heating system. No doubt they all seem friendly, tossing around impressive terms. But how can you tell how good they are? One way is to hire contractors who are certified by NATE (North American Technician Excellence, Inc.).

A technician must pass a comprehensive exam to become NATE certified. According to Dave Schrock, executive vice president of Comfort Air Distributors, a NATE certification trainer, state licensing of installers and technicians is inconsistent. Some states require licensing, some don't. "Until NATE, there really wasn't any way for the consumer to know if their contractor really knew what they're doing," says Schrock.

The consumer should ask a contractor if the technician or installer has NATE certification. A company may be NATE certified, Schrock explains, without having every technician certified.

The NATE website ([natex.org](http://natex.org)) allows you to locate contractors in your area who employ NATE certified technicians. You can also call to get information at NATE's toll-free number, 1-877-420-NATE. A NATE-certified technician carries a wallet card identifying him as such. Don't be reluctant to ask to see it. Remember it's your comfort and your home and money that is involved.

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Photo courtesy of Trane

# Maintain Your Furnace

Your heating bills will be unnecessarily high if the furnace is poorly maintained. Simple tasks and a professional tune-up will ensure your furnace performs at its highest efficiency.

## Regular maintenance

You can perform some of the necessary routine maintenance on your heating system.

1. Clean or replace air filters monthly during the heating season.
2. Vacuum register grilles and make sure they are unrestricted by furniture, carpet or drapes. Also, use the adjustable blades on registers to reduce heated air in unused rooms of the home.
3. To save energy, turn off the pilot light during the summer months.

## Heating Tune-ups

Existing equipment can be upgraded to perform more efficiently. A professional contractor may be your best answer to realizing savings, before you're ready to replace your heating system. Xcel Energy recommends tuning up older systems every year or two, and newer systems every two to three years.

A tune-up should take two to three hours and cost between \$100 -150. In addition to the following steps, technicians should test the efficiency of your furnace before and after the tune up, and provide you with a copy of the results. The efficiency test measures flue temperature, percent carbon dioxide or oxygen, smoke number, carbon monoxide, and draft.

## Furnace tune-ups

- Removing and cleaning burners.
- Cleaning and checking the heat exchanger for possible carbon monoxide leaks.
- Removing the blower and cleaning blower blades.
- Lubricating any parts that need it.
- Checking the evaporator coil if there is central air conditioning.