

# Time to tune up air conditioner

With rising oil and gas prices, a lot of attention has been focused on the value of regularly servicing the home heating unit.

But don't overlook air conditioning maintenance jobs, because the cost of cooling a house can sometimes be more expensive than the cost of heating one.

Tuning up an air conditioner is an easy do-it-yourself job that pays dividends, according to Al Ubell, author of an energy-saving guide. Now that the weather has cooled down a bit and the air conditioner is not in constant use, it's a good time to service your unit.

"The first thing to remember about air conditioners is that even the most efficient are relatively expensive to operate," Ubell said.

"All air conditioners should be serviced once a year. And that

means motors should be lubricated, coils cleaned and filters changed.

"AIR CONDITIONERS operate as heat and humidity extractors. They draw warm, moist air out of a room or house, remove the heat and the moisture and dissipate them outside the structure. Dirt will hinder the flow of hot air and make the unit work longer, thus increasing the energy bill."

Air conditioner coils are heat exchangers. Interior coils absorb heat and exterior coils expel it.

"Dirt buildup on the coils hinders both functions," Ubell explained. "You can clean the external coils with a damp rag or a soft brush and then vacuum. You can hose down the external coils while watering your lawn or washing your car."

Before anything is done with

filters, Ubell cautioned it is important that the unit be turned off and unplugged. Running fan blades are dangerous. The filters in window units should be cleaned or replaced once a month during the cooling season. Foam filters should be washed in shampoo or in liquid detergent. The washed filter may be replaced while it's still damp.

During the summer, filters in central air conditioners should be changed every month. Most units have a pair of filters that sell for about \$1 each.

HERE ARE more money-saving hints on air conditioning.

● Try to place the individual window unit on the north side of the home or in the shade. If that's impossible, place an awning over the unit. Less heat outside the house makes it easier for the unit to dissipate heat from the inside.

● Take a look to see that no bugs or rodents have taken up residence.

● Keep furniture, drapes and shrubbery away from the unit and vents to assure proper air circulation.

● Keep your home at 78 degrees. Not only will you help save energy, you'll save on your electric bill. For every degree you raise the temperature in an air conditioned room, you'll save 2 or 3 percent of your cooling costs.

● On very hot days, the air conditioner will perform most efficiently with the fan set on high. But in very humid weather, the opposite is true. A low fan speed allows more moisture to be removed.

● If your air conditioner is more than eight years old, you might consider buying a new high efficiency model. You could save as much as 30 percent in operating costs.

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