

Now's time to prep little-used furnace

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

PICTURE A dormant furnace in the basement gasping and sputtering, realizing winter is near. Picture it desperately striving to warm your house. Picture its little ticker as it gives out.

Picture your blue toes when you wake up at 3:30 a.m. to find your furnace has — to put it euphemistically — passed on.

Now picture the repairman telling you he'll be right out to fix the furnace — in about seven days after he takes care of the other multitude of furnaces he has agreed to fix.

And while you're at it, picture the dent in your checkbook when the repairman leaves.

So grab a screwdriver and get down in the basement and prep that metal beast for the winter months ahead.

• WHAT TO DO

So you're in the basement, crawl space or back room, and the furnace is in front of you — now what do you do?

"One thing people don't do but should is to go down to the furnace in the middle of August and see if the pilot light is still on," said Bob McQueen of Flame Furnace in Livonia.

It would amaze people the number of calls heating and cooling servicers get on the first morning of the annual cold snap that need nothing more than a relighted pilot light, McQueen said.

That done, the homeowner should change the furnace filters and oil the blower unit. Locate the access panel to the blower unit and remove it to reveal the blower fan and above air filters.

Instructions for oiling the blower unit and changing the filters often are found on the inside of the access panel, but the homeowner may have to go hunting for the owner's manual, McQueen said.

A rule of thumb is to change the air filters every two months during furnace use, McQueen said, adding it may even be wise to change the filters every month during heaviest usage.

Oiling the moving parts on the blower unit should be done annually in the fall. Experts also suggest cleaning the inside of the blower unit chamber as much as possible.

For those furnaces equipped with a humidifier, McQueen said the homeowner can clean or replace the filter in that as well.

• BE FILTER WISE

Don Green, owner of D&G Heating

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Service technician Eric Ribbertrop of S & M Heating Sales begins a twice-yearly furnace check by examining the furnace humidifier.

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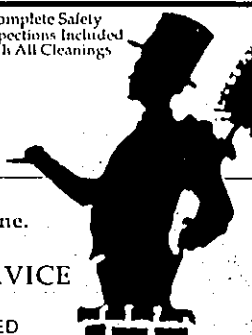
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