



Ken Field

Owner of Slate Belt Energy Services

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Heatwave Help

I have seen more air conditioners struggle to keep homes cool and dry this year than in many years. I know it has been hot but I don't think it has been that extreme. I have noticed that many people are keeping their thermostats set lower than what I think is normal. The government says 78° is a good temperature but I doubt any government official keeps theirs at that temperature. Anything at or below 70° seems too low to me. I believe the comfort zone is between 73° and 75°. Energy bills will be much more reasonable in that range and it most likely does not exceed the design of a normal air conditioning system. A 20° reduction from outside is typical when it is 95° outside. A system can be designed for any temperature you want but oversizing has serious comfort consequences. It is also not wise to design a system that will still be oversized on the dozen or so hottest days that we get. There is only a short time of the day where maximum heat load takes place. The sun causes a major part of it so from about 11am to 3pm there will be a peak. If you take measures to eliminate sunlight from coming in during those times, you have already made a significant move toward improving indoor comfort.

After the sun begins to set the heat will be removed from your home quickly and the system will get a break. The biggest factors that will affect the efficiency of your system are some of the easiest to find visually. A dirty air filter will slow the air and can cause frost to form on the indoor coil.

When that happens the frost blocks the airflow and it gets worse by the minute until the indoor coil is just a block of ice. At that point you need to turn off the outdoor unit and allow the fan to run inside for several hours to thaw the ice. Another problem that is easy to see is a dirty coil on the outdoor unit. It is like a giant vacuum cleaner always drawing in air from the sides and discharging it out the top. Grass clippings, mulch dust, and sometimes even dryer lint can build up on the fins and the impact they have can be devastating to the performance of the system on a hot day. So keep an eye on the things you don't need a technician for and you may make it all the way through the next heatwave without needing a visit from the air doctor.

Ken Field is the owner of Slate Belt Energy and Field's Service, Inc. As a certified energy rater and contractor, he is qualified to assess every aspect of energy usage and prescribe solutions to save energy. He can be reached at 610-759-6306 or email Ken@FieldsService.com

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