



**Ken
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Planned Obsolescence

The life expectancy of a central air conditioning system was always said to be about 20 years. The life expectancy of a heat pump was more like 12-15. Those numbers were only published so that people could plan for a system replacement or at least know when to expect breakdowns. It is rare for someone to replace a system just because of its age but when repairs are needed frequently or a leak in the refrigerant system develops, the end of useful life of that system is obviously imminent. Some systems have problems early on and others seem to just keep ticking along without any breakdowns. I have never been able to pinpoint any particular brand that was prone to problems and I can't say that the lower efficiency units were any better or worse than the high efficiency models. The government entered the game by banning the refrigerant that was used since the 1950s. This is only a problem for the people who replaced their equipment after the announcement of that ban and who still chose to use the old refrigerant. Far too many contractors refused to use equipment containing the new refrigerant for many years after it was introduced and thus left their customers with units that still have life in them but will be very expensive to repair. If your system is over 20 years old and uses R22 (the old refrigerant) and it develops a leak or a repair that requires more refrigerant you will surely see how the ban has affected prices. In order to punish people for using that refrigerant, the price has been pushed through the roof. Unfortunately there is not a good replacement for it that can just be used in place of R22. There are some that are close but none that can just be put in and mixed with the old refrigerant. The goal is to get all of these systems out of service and replace them with something new. Many of the parts for those systems are obsolete and you won't be able to keep fixing it even if you wanted to.

Unfortunately the refrigerant that replaced R22 is R410A and it is also being phased out. In another 20 years things will be much the same for the people who have new systems currently as they are now for people with R22 systems now.

What I know from experience is that a system that is installed properly and connected to a duct system that functions correctly will experience fewer breakdowns than systems where the installers cut corners.

My suggestion is to upgrade soon and choose a reputable contractor. In the long run it will cost less.

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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