

Ten Fall Furnace Tips

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Fall is here and it is time to light the furnace. A little maintenance and inspection can help prevent emergency repairs.

- Start by turning off the power to the furnace. There should be a switch similar to a light switch on the side of the unit with a screw in fuse next to it. The fuse may be under a square metal lid. Remove the fuse also and verify it is in good condition. If you can't find a switch to turn off the power then flip the circuit breaker in your electric panel that operates the furnace to off. Do not work on your furnace unless you can verify the power is off.

- Turn off the gas to the furnace. There should be a valve on the gas pipe going into the furnace. When the valve handle is turned perpendicular to the supply pipe the gas is off. If the valve will not turn have it replaced by a licensed contractor.

- Remove the covers from the burner compartment and the blower compartment. Using a shop vac remove any dirt from inside the furnace. Try to clean out any dirt on the fins of the bower. A flexible brush similar to one used for cleaning refrigerator coils works well. They are available from Nicholson Hardware. If the burners are visible try to suck out any rust around the burner. Do not blow air into the heat exchanger holding the burners. The dust will settle back on top of the burner and cause problems. If there is a lot of rust flakes on and around the burners you should have it cleaned by a licensed contractor.

- Inspect the blower. Units that are driven by a belt will often have locations to oil the bearings. One on each side of the blower and on the motor. They sometimes will have a small hinged cap covering the tube. Motor bearing oil is available with an extending tube on the bottle to make the job easier. Oil the bearings until the motor and blower rotate smoothly when you pull on the belt. If the belt looks worn change it now. Spin the blower by pulling on the belt or by reaching in on the side on the type without a belt and turning the fins of the blower. If it sounds like metal is scraping when it turns have a licensed contractor inspect the unit.



- Check the vent on the furnace. Metal vents exhaust the gas up the chimney. The pipe should be secure and without any rust holes. The connection at the chimney should be completely sealed. If there are any openings seal them with furnace cement. If the pipe needs to be replaced the law requires you use a licensed contractor. Furnaces with a PVC vent pipe are the high efficiency type. The vent will go out of the side of the building. Go outside and check that there is no obstruction on the vent pipe from animals or bugs building nests.

- Change the furnace filter. Buy some extra ones and keep them by the furnace. Changing the filter once a month will help keep the furnace running well.

- Install the cover on the blower compartment. Turn the power back on. Make sure the dial on the gas valve in the burner compartment is turned to off. Turn the valve on the gas pipe to the on position. Relight the pilot if your furnace is a standing pilot type. The flame should burn steady and mostly blue. If it does not stay lit or burn clean you should have the furnace serviced by a licensed contractor.

- Turn up the thermostat all the way. The furnace should light without having flame flash out of the heat exchanger where the burners are located. The flame should be even and mostly blue. After the burners run for maybe a minute or two the blower should turn on. Check again for flame rolling out of the heat exchanger when the fan kicks on. Turn the furnace power and gas back off if you have problems with flame coming out of the heat exchanger and have the unit serviced by a licensed contractor before you attempt to use it again.

- After the burners run for a few minutes check that the vent pipe on units venting up the chimney is hot. You should be able to hold a match near the joints in the pipe or where the pipe begins and see the flame or the smoke from an extinguished match go up the pipe. If you are not sure the furnace is venting have it inspected by a licensed contractor.

- Remember to install your CO detectors as required by law. If the CO detector goes off when the furnace runs turn it off and have it inspected. ■