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ENERGY SERVICES

THE TIP SHEET



COOLING SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

Make sure your home’s air conditioning will keep you cooled comfortably during the warm months, without driving up your utility bills. Whether you have central or heat-pump air conditioning, ductless (mini-split) units or individual room units, there are steps you can take to keep your air conditioner in good working order and prevent problems throughout the cooling season.

Regular maintenance and preventive care can lengthen the life of your air conditioner, keep energy costs down and make your home more comfortable.

Follow these tips to maintain your air conditioners and spend less on cooling your home. Don’t forget to unplug your unit before you begin do-it-yourself projects.

CHECK	WHAT	WHICH SYSTEMS	HOW	WHY
	Check air filters—clean or change them	All	Replace dirty disposable filters. Clean permanent filters with mild household detergent and water. Rinse well. Dry filter completely before reinserting.	Filters remove dust, particles and allergens from the air. Dirty air filters can increase energy costs, too.
	Clear grass, weeds and debris away from outside units	All except room units	Remove debris and trim foliage at least two feet around the unit. When you mow, aim grass clippings away.	Units use less electricity when air can move freely through coils.
	Check your ductwork—look for disconnected ducts, leaks or poor insulation	Central, heat pump	Use mastic sealant or metal tape—never duct tape—to seal all ducts within reach. Straighten tangled or kinked ducts, or hire a professional.	Air conditioners work longer and harder to replace cooled air that leaks before it reaches the room.
	Keep registers and vents clean	Central, heat pump	Check that nothing blocks or sits on the registers, including pets	Free air circulation puts cool air where you want it
	Clean condenser coils (outside unit)	All except room units	Shut off power to the unit, then gently wash down with garden hose.	Even a thin film of dirt inhibits air movement through the coils and makes your air conditioner work harder.
	Clean inside coils (inside the house)	Central, heat pump	Use a vacuum to gently clean coils, taking care not to damage the coil fins.	Dirt can prevent coils from collecting heat. Clean coils inside and out reduce the unit’s electricity use.
	Straighten condenser coil fins	All except room units	Buy a “fin comb” from an air conditioner dealer and carefully comb fins on outside and indoor coils.	Straight, clean fins allow air to move freely through the coils, which improves efficiency.
	Unclog drain ports	Central, heat pump	Clean ports with short piece of wire hanger or pocketknife.	Prevent damage from water leaks, and control humidity.
	Inspect window seals	Room units	Make sure the window frame makes contact with the unit’s metal case.	Keep the hot air out and cool air in to improve comfort and use less energy.
	Choose proper location	Room units	Move the unit to a window that is shaded or is not in direct sunlight.	Fans must work harder to cool the outside coil when they are in direct sunlight.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR USING YOUR AIR CONDITIONER:

- Always keep all windows and doors to the outside closed.
- Don't cool unoccupied rooms. If you have registers, don't close more than half of them—restricting air flow too much can cause your unit to malfunction.
- Got a ceiling fan? Set the thermostat higher—you will still be comfortable. Keep the fan on low speed when humid.
- When you're not home, set your thermostat to 78 F or higher. Setting the thermostat lower cools a warm room colder, not faster, and it uses more energy to do it.
- Consider getting a programmable thermostat for central units, especially if you're away from home at the same times during the week. Some programmable thermostats can be controlled from your computer or smart phone.
- Keep lamps, televisions and other electronics away from a room unit's thermostat. The thermostat can sense their heat, which may cause the air conditioner to run longer than necessary.

Consider calling in a professional air conditioning maintenance contractor to tune up your system before the cooling season. A tuneup will maximize your comfort in the summer, help your air conditioner last longer and run better, and save on monthly energy bills.

SOURCES:

U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Savers

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<http://www.aceee.org/consumer/cooling>

HVAC for Beginners

<http://www.hvac-for-beginners.com/ductless-ac-maintenance.html>

Energy Services Web site
www.wapa.gov/es

Western's Energy
Expert's Hotline
800-769-3756

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