

# How To Select an Air Conditioning Contractor

By Joe Talent

While homeowners often undertake many kinds of home renovations, installation and/or repair of heating, ventilating, air conditioning and refrigeration equipment is usually an exceptional measure. Many states require the hiring of a licensed or qualified HVAC tradesman to perform the work because of the safety concerns and consequences involved.

The purchase of an air conditioning or ventilation system is a major consideration and investment. Consumers should be aware that the lowest price is not always the best value. To get the best value, the following key points should be remembered:

1: Identifying a Contractor. - You may wish to contact friends, neighbors, relatives and co-workers for opinions on work done recently by an HVAC contractor. You can also use the business directory and advertisements in your area newspaper to identify contractors. In most cases you'll be better off with contractors who promote the quality of their service and equipment at a reasonable rate rather than just low prices. It may be best to select experienced firms, and if possible, to visit their office or showroom. You will want to determine if the contractor has appropriately certified personnel on staff and if 24 hour emergency service is available, and whether the contractor offers maintenance and service agreements after the installation and warranty. The warranty policy should be clearly stated for equipment, materials and labor and should indicate who is responsible for honoring the warranty.

2: Getting Estimates - Arrange for the contractor to come and inspect the job site. Some small jobs may be priced out and an estimate written immediately but larger jobs may require additional time to price properly and prepare a heat loss and gain calculation for proper sizing of the equipment.

When comparing estimates received, make sure it's written on a proper form that is easily read and understood. The work to be performed and the materials used should be of comparable quality or make the appropriate allowances for differences. Be sure that the permit includes the proper permits and licenses. If the contractor uses sub-contractors for some of the actual work, these should be listed on the proposal and in the contract.

3: The Contract - The contract is the agreement between the homeowner and the contractor that specifies what work will be performed and gives a firm dollar value on that work. It is a legal binding document when signed by both parties, so be sure you understand and agree with the contents before signing. Any changes or additions in work to be done would never be made

without those alterations being written into the contract and initialed by both parties. If any extra billing is to occur, it must be clearly stated and initialed by both parties. In addition to the name, address, and telephone number of the consumer and the contractor, the contract should clearly state the following items;

- a) required licenses and permits must be purchased by the contractor,
- b) responsibility for removal of old equipment and materials,
- c) warranties and guarantees on materials and labor,
- d) approximate start and completion dates, unless specific dates are agreed upon,
- e) price and terms of payment
- f) provision of consumer orientation regarding operation and maintenance of the equipment, and
- g) provision of an operations and maintenance manual.

4: Payment Methods - The payment schedule may vary from company to company. In any case, the payment schedule should be easy to understand, and clearly state if interest charges are applicable. A nominal deposit may be requested. Get a receipt for your deposit or have the amount shown on the contract and have the salesman initial it. All payments should be made directly to the company named in the contract.

5: Insurance - It is important that the contractor and any subcontractors each have liability and property damage insurance, and be able to produce a current document substantiating they have the necessary insurance to keep both parties safe of damage claims.

6: References - Reputable contractors will be more than willing to give you the names and addresses of customers they've done work for in your area.