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factsheet

Winter Heat Pump Tips

Heating Your Home

Heat pumps operate most efficiently when outside temperatures are above about 35°F. To keep your energy costs down, Pepco recommends a thermostat setting of 68°F. Once your thermostat is set to where you want it, leave it alone (unless you have a programmable heat pump thermostat). In fact, manually raising the temperature can cause your auxiliary heat to come on, using more energy than you may have saved by turning your thermostat down.

Programmable Heat Pump Thermostat

Programmable heat pump thermostats help you save money by letting you automatically adjust the temperature in your home at various times. With a programmable thermostat, you can automatically raise or lower the temperature at night and gradually change it back to a comfortable temperature by morning. In the winter, the thermostat is programmed to increase your home's temperature very gradually, so there is no waste of energy by triggering the auxiliary heat.

Auxiliary (Supplementary) Heat

Electric resistance heaters supply the auxiliary heat for your heat pump. When the outdoor temperature falls to about 35°F or below, the auxiliary heat is automatically activated to keep your home comfortable. **Resistance heaters are less efficient, which means they use a lot more electricity and cost significantly more to operate.** You will know it is running because the Aux heat indicator on your thermostat will be on.

It is possible to activate the auxiliary heat by manually raising the thermostat temperature as little as 2 degrees. Regardless of whether the auxiliary heat is activated automatically or manually, the Aux heat indicator will come on to indicate the backup heat's operation. If the Aux heat indicator remains on for a prolonged period of time when the outdoor temperature is above 40°F, your unit may not be operating properly and you should contact your heat pump contractor.

Keeping Your Heat Pump Healthy

- Clean permanent filters and replace disposable filters when they are visibly dirty. A dirty air filter can restrict air flow and cause damage to your compressor. Check your filters monthly to ensure they are clean.
- Always leave supply and return registers open and clear, even if a room is not in use. Closing registers restricts air flow and can reduce the performance of your heat pump and damage the compressor. Do not block registers with furniture, carpet, drapes or other objects.
- Keep the outdoor unit free of grass, loose leaves, shrubbery and any other obstruction. Clean the outdoor unit by spraying it with a garden hose. ALWAYS BE SURE TO CUT OFF POWER BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO CLEAN THE OUTDOOR UNIT. Remove snow from the outdoor unit with a brush or broom. Snow accumulation beneath the heat pump is not a problem as long as the air flow is not blocked.
- Have a qualified heat pump contractor check your heat pump annually. The best time to check it is before the start of the heating or cooling season. Most contractors offer various service plans which cover routine and emergency maintenance.