

HVAC Replacement?

Contributed by C. Mason Hearn
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Mason:

I am considering the purchase of a 1960's home, which has a couple of old-looking heating and air conditioning systems. I am concerned that these might be in need of replacement. How would I know if these are going to be a problem?

Patrick

Dear Patrick:

First, let me suggest the engagement of an independent, professional home inspector prior to making any purchase decisions on an older home. These guys are well worth their fees, to let you know what you might be getting into in regards mechanical systems, as well as the multitude of other concerns you might encounter. Naturally, expect that in a 40-year-old home, there will be some things that won't be in perfect condition.

In regards you specific question, short such a professional inspection, I can tell you that mechanical equipment does indeed have a certain life expectancy. The heat pumps that we are seeing "going down" today are typically about 15 years old. Gas or oil furnaces will typically last longer — 20 — 25 years; maybe more if well-maintained.

Some equipment is clearly tagged on an info plate, as to their manufacture date. More likely, that information is encrypted within the serial number, which may be decoded by an inspector or HVAC professional.

I am sure that you know the benefits of trading-up to newer, more efficient units. If your heat pump is 15 years old, it likely has a SEER (seasonal energy efficiency rating) of somewhere between 8 and 12. By law, the LOWEST such efficiency available on the market today is 13. As well, older units might not be operating even at their rated efficiency. So by replacement, you could potentially recognize in excess of 50% better efficiency.

Good luck!

Mason