ONE HOUR
HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING®
Always On Time...Or You Don't Pay A Dime!®

Your Burning HVAC Questions Answered

When it comes to your HVAC system, no matter the question that is festering in the back of your mind, we have probably been asked it. From “ghost radiators,” (radiators that are still producing heat, even once turned off) to mouse mummies discovered in the ductwork, we have heard it all.

One benefit of having heard the most frequently asked HVAC questions is that we have a list of common, burning questions that seem to come up most.

In this FAQ guide, you’ll learn what could be causing your headaches and how to avoid them, as well as tips for removing dead rodents from your ventilation, and much more!

Read on to have your Burning HVAC Questions Answered.

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How to Avoid Headaches Related to Air Conditioning?

Does air conditioning (AC) cause headaches? Unfortunately, for some people, the answer is yes. AC is a necessity during the summer in many parts of the country, but too many homeowners and office workers pay the price. Read on for some reasons why air conditioning could be causing your headaches and ideas on how to solve the problem.

Dehydration, Noise, and Chemicals

There are a variety of reasons why air conditioning could cause headaches and contribute to your discomfort:

Dehydration: While the air conditioner is cooling off the air, it can also draw all the humidity out of it. This is great up to a point, but if the air gets too dry and you don't consume enough water, you can end up with a dehydration headache. Combat this effect by running a humidifier in conjunction with the AC and making sure that you drink plenty of water during the day.

Blood Vessel Contraction: When you get too cold, the blood vessels in your brain can contract, which is one potential cause of a headache. Try turning the temperature up a few notches and see if that helps soothe your symptoms.

Excessive Noise: If the air conditioning unit is too loud, or if it happens to make sounds on a frequency that bothers you, your head will pay the price. If you think the air conditioner compressor noise is the source of your problem, an AC technician might be able to adjust the unit, or you may need a new model altogether.

Chemicals and Allergens: Your AC unit could be circulating more than just cold air. If you have a forced-air system and the vents aren't clean, the unit could be sending dust, pollen and other allergens all over your home. Furthermore, if you use harsh cleaning chemicals in your home or office, and don't have adequate ventilation, the air conditioner will just blow the toxic irritants into your airspace again and again. You can address the problem by having an air quality HVAC specialist give your HVAC system a thorough cleaning and making sure that your indoor space is properly vented.

Doctors and HVAC Technicians to the Rescue

For migraines or serious reoccurring headaches, you should consult a physician. If the problem is mild enough to address on your own, the best remedy depends on which factor or combination of factors is causing your headaches. If you're convinced that the air conditioner is the cause of your headaches, have a qualified HVAC technician come to conduct maintenance, cleaning and repairs and see if that helps.

What to Do When a Rodent Dies in Your Ductwork?

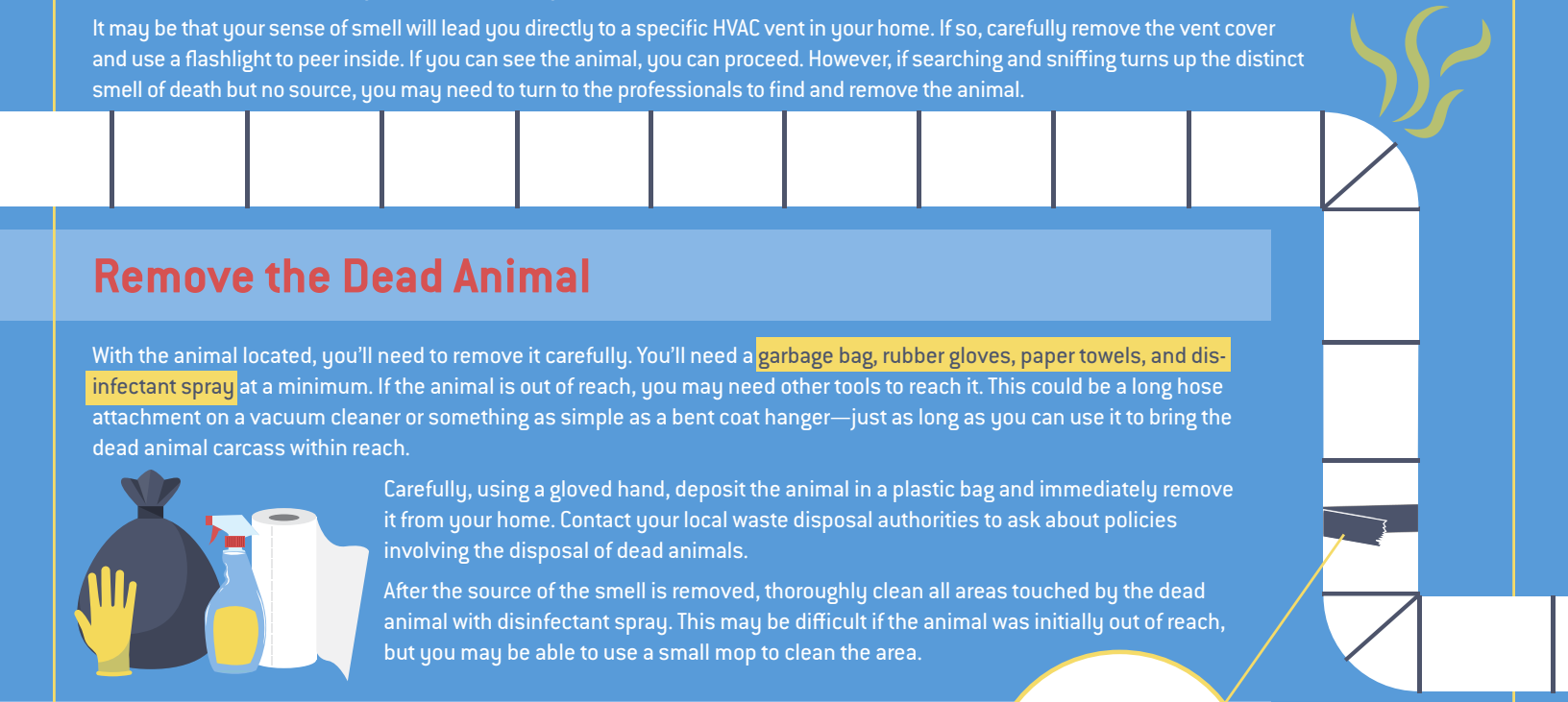
It's a horrifying thought, but it's nevertheless a situation many homeowners face: a mouse, rat, or other small animal has died in an air duct and is spreading foul air all over the home. While the process of removing a dead animal from the vent is unpleasant, the good news is the area can be completely cleaned and the odor removed.

However, before you take the first step, know that you can outsource this entire job to a professional if you just can't stomach the thought of handling it yourself. You should explain the situation when you call for service; some HVAC service providers may refer you to an animal control provider instead, but many HVAC technicians will be able to remove the dead mouse or rodent properly.

Tracking the Smell in Your Home

It's usually the unmistakable smell that first tips off homeowners to the possible presence of a decomposing animal. Sometimes the smell can be so strong that you might suspect the animal is in the ductwork, when really, it's in an attic, basement, or crawlspace. Unfortunately, to pinpoint the source of a dead rodent in the vents, you'll need to follow your nose.

It may be that your sense of smell will lead you directly to a specific HVAC vent in your home. If so, carefully remove the vent cover and use a flashlight to peer inside. If you can see the animal, you can proceed. However, if searching and sniffing turns up the distinct smell of death but no source, you may need to turn to the professionals to find and remove the animal.

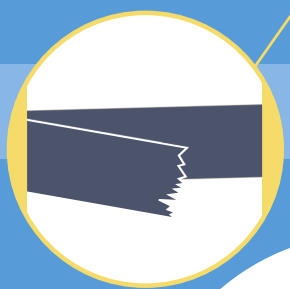


Remove the Dead Animal

With the animal located, you'll need to remove it carefully. You'll need a garbage bag, rubber gloves, paper towels, and disinfectant spray at a minimum. If the animal is out of reach, you may need other tools to reach it. This could be a long hose attachment on a vacuum cleaner or something as simple as a bent coat hanger—just as long as you can use it to bring the dead animal carcass within reach.

Carefully, using a gloved hand, deposit the animal in a plastic bag and immediately remove it from your home. Contact your local waste disposal authorities to ask about policies involving the disposal of dead animals.

After the source of the smell is removed, thoroughly clean all areas touched by the dead animal with disinfectant spray. This may be difficult if the animal was initially out of reach, but you may be able to use a small mop to clean the area.



Plug the Leak in Your Ductwork

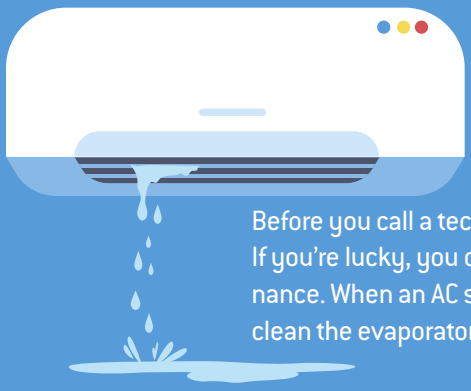
Once the animal is removed and the area is cleaned, you should consider follow-up steps. A thorough inspection of your system and ductwork could reveal how the animal was able to enter your ductwork in the first place and is likely to uncover duct leaks that are also robbing you of energy efficiency. If your next system tune-up is still some time away, it's a good idea to go ahead and schedule an inspection of your vents.

You might also want to schedule professional duct cleaning and duct sealing, which can thoroughly scrub, disinfect and seal most duct surfaces. This is often the best way to rid the space of any lingering odors and offer peace of mind about any bacteria or viruses the dead animal may have left behind. The duct sealing will ensure that any areas the rodent may have entered are sealed from repeat intrusion.

When Do You Need to Change the Coolant in Your Air Conditioning System?

If you're lucky, you'll never have to change the coolant in your air conditioning system. The equipment is designed with a closed loop – if nothing goes wrong, the coolant should last for the life of your AC unit. However, there are occasions when the air conditioning system could leak or malfunction, which can require replacement of the coolant. Read on for tips on how to diagnose a coolant problem and recognize when you need a recharge.

Rule Out Maintenance Problems First



The most obvious sign of a coolant leak is when your air conditioning system stops functioning properly. If your HVAC unit is not cooling your home effectively, or if you can feel warm air blowing through the ducts when the unit is supposed to be cooling, it's time for an investigation. Other signs of a potential leak are excessive condensation or ice buildup on the cooling equipment.

Before you call a technician for a refill, there are a few other potential causes that you should rule out first. If you're lucky, you can get your air conditioning system running like new again with a little routine maintenance. When an AC system gets dirty, its efficiency drops, so the first thing to do is change the air filter and clean the evaporator and condenser coolers, clearing any leaves or other debris that might be in the area.

Plug the Leak and Recharge

If your air conditioning system still isn't working properly, it's time to have a professional inspect it and verify if you have a coolant leak. A qualified technician can repair the AC leak, recharge the system with coolant and get you back up and running.

There are a few different types of air conditioning coolants on the market. The most common is R-22, otherwise known as Freon. However, Freon is being phased out in the United States due to environmental concerns, and the dwindling supplies are causing the price to skyrocket. New systems are more likely to use R410A, also called Puron, which is considered to be more environmentally friendly. Unfortunately, you can't just replace Freon with Puron – you'll need to purchase a whole new air conditioning system to make the switch.

Professional Certification Needed

Recharging coolant is not a DIY affair, and in most circumstances, homeowners cannot even purchase the coolant themselves. People who handle coolant for air conditioning systems need to be certified by the Environmental Protection Agency, and retailers usually won't sell to unlicensed customers. Furthermore, coolant in the air conditioner is kept under high pressure and it is dangerous for non-professionals to attempt to charge it.

Why Freon for Your Air Conditioning System is Expensive?

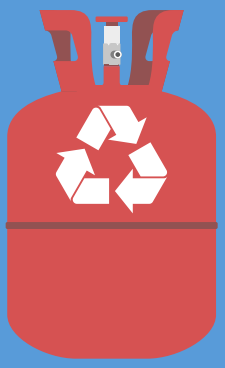
If your air conditioning system uses Freon, there's bad news for your pocketbook: the cost to replace the chemical has been skyrocketing, so it will be an expensive fix if you need to refill the unit.

A Hole in the Ozone

Freon, a gas also called R-22, absorbs heat and humidity from the air, making it an essential component of many air conditioning systems. Unfortunately, in addition to its fantastic cooling properties, the odorless and tasteless gas is also a prime contributor to ozone erosion and climate change. That's why the Montreal Protocol environmental agreement scheduled a phase-out of Freon in developing countries, beginning in 2004, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Starting in that year, the United States had to reduce its consumption of R-22 by 35 percent. The figure was bumped up to 75 percent by 2010, and 90 percent by January 1, 2015. Finally, in 2020, R-22 levels were required to be reduced by 99.5 percent of their previous usage, effectively eliminating them from the U.S. market.

A Question of Supply and Demand



The problem is that there are still numerous functioning air conditioning systems that use Freon as their coolant. If you have one of these and your system leaks coolant, you could be stuck paying through the nose to replace it. Even though Freon is still being produced, the supply has dwindled as producers have cut back in anticipation of lower demand. Therefore, maintenance people and air conditioning system specialists have less supply and are charging more for it. Some businesses have even reported thefts targeting their Freon canisters thanks to its newfound value.

After 2020, R-22 won't be produced at all in the United States. The only source will be from providers who have recycled the gas from old refrigerators and air conditioning systems, so the price could reach astronomical heights.

Stop Your AC Unit from Leaking Freon

One way to limit the amount of Freon you must buy is to purchase a new air conditioning system that uses more environmentally-friendly coolant. If you don't have the cash for that, have an HVAC specialist come by to fix any leaks in your unit so you can hold onto the precious Freon – helping the environment and your budget at the same time.

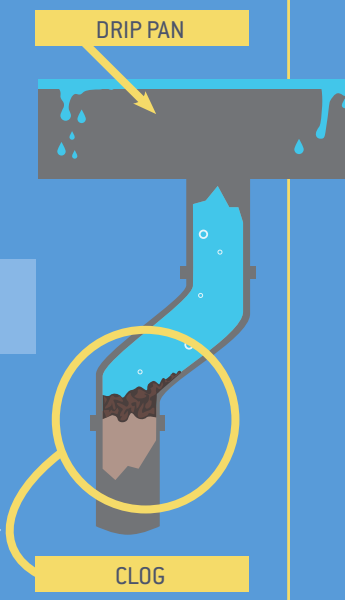
What to Do When Your Air Conditioner Drain Line is Clogged?

Your air conditioner not only removes heat from your home, but it also removes humidity as well. During the sticky days of summer, it can take a lot of moisture out of your indoor air -- and all that water has to go somewhere. Ideally, it collects in your air handler's condensate drip pan, where it flows into a drain tube that leads outside your home. But this tube can become clogged over time, and that can lead to water damage.

How Do Clogs Form?

The water that collects in your air handler's condensate pan contains microscopic bacteria and other tiny particles from the air. As it drips through the drain line, the water leaves behind a residue that can build up to form algae, mold and even wet clumps of dust and dirt.

Since the drain line leads to the outdoors, it's also possible that clogs can form from that end, as well. If the drain line exits in an especially dusty place, it could be clogged with a dirt clod. And if you haven't used your air conditioner in a while, it's possible that insects have built a nest in the opening.

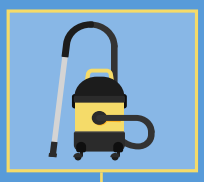


How Do I Know if I Have a Clog?

When your drain line clogs up, what happens next depends on your air handler's features. Many modern air handlers can detect when the drip pan is too full and respond by shutting down. The most sophisticated models can even send a text message or email when this happens. While this is an inconvenience, it's better than the drip pan overflowing.

If your air handler doesn't have this feature, you might not notice a problem until you see water dripping through your ceiling or out of your vents. This means that the drip pan has already overflowed, and you should shut down your air conditioner immediately.

How Do I Clear a Drain Line Clog?



Clearing a drain line requires certain equipment, notably a wet/dry shop vac and possibly an air compressor. If your air handler is located in your attic, it will also require working up there, possibly in a tight space. If you're unable to do this or lack the equipment, you should leave this job up to an HVAC technician -- it's a quick emergency repair.

If you want to try clearing it yourself, you need to start by locating your air handler's condensate drip pan, which is usually at the bottom of the unit. Carefully slide the pan out (it may be full to the brim) and use a wet/dry vac to remove the water. Remove the pan completely and wash it in hot, soapy water to remove any buildup.

Next, try to clear the drain line with suction or positive air pressure. You can try vacuuming the line from either end, but the challenge will be in creating a tight seal around the vacuum hose. You may need to experiment with different attachments or improvise by wrapping a rag around an attachment. Vacuuming will be more effective if you have a partner plug up the other end of the line.

Alternatively, you can use an air compressor to blast air into the air handler's end of the drain tube, in the hopes of blowing the clog out the other end.

Once the drain line is clear, use a funnel to slowly pour a gallon of white vinegar through the tube. This will help kill any remaining mold and algae and can help mitigate the risk of future clogging.

GET TO KNOW ONE HOUR

For decades, One Hour Heating & Air Conditioning has been providing quality and reliable HVAC services to homeowners across the country. We are the premier HVAC service provider in the United States for a simple reason: we actually care about your comfort.

We take great pride in the One Hour Heating & Air Conditioning difference, which keeps our customers satisfied, happy, and comfortable in their homes.

When it's time to choose an HVAC company to work with, we want you to know what sets One Hour apart from the competition.

We're Local

We have One Hour locations throughout the United States, so you're sure to have a One Hour expert right in your neighborhood! Our offices our independently owned and operated, so you'll be supporting a local business paired with the high-quality work from a national brand.

UWIN® Guarantee

We're "Always On Time . . . Or You Don't Pay A Dime!" That's right, if our service professional is just one minute behind, the service is on us. This on-time guarantee is one of the best in the U.S.

Our Technicians

Every One Hour location employs skilled, friendly, and courteous HVAC professionals. Our employees go through extensive background checks and random drug testing, where permitted by law. We also offer a variety of continued professional learning opportunities for our technicians.

Our Code of Ethics

Every One Hour follows our Code of Ethics closely to ensure we are bringing our customers the professional services they need. The core values of our Code of Ethics are:

Integrity • Respect for the Law • Excellence • Safety & Reputation • Teamwork
Service • Respect for Others • Privacy • Competition

One Hour Heating & Air Conditioning is here for you for your HVAC needs when you need us!

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