

But SEER-iously, Folks!

By Al Stoy, guest columnist

Winter is finally behind us and the time for cooling our homes has arrived. If you're from the South, you've probably been counting the days, dreaming of flip flops and sweet tea, especially with the late arrival of Spring this year. But as cold temperatures and the pollen season move out, we begin our Hotlanta months! Air conditioners are about to be on high alert. Just as the seasons change, so do guidelines for the manufacturing of major energy-consuming residential electrical appliances. Improved energy efficiency is at the forefront of technology development, and there is always a transition period between the old, power-guzzling systems and the new.

It's been seven years since the new minimum "13 SEER" ratings became federal mandates for air conditioning systems. "SEER" stands for **Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio**, which is the measure of efficiency applied to the cooling process of air conditioners and heat pumps. Newer efficiency standards have prompted a transition away from ozone-depleting, R-22 refrigerants to systems that rely on replacement refrigerants like R-410A, which has led to major technical redesigns. New systems incorporate compressors and other components specially designed for use with specific replacement refrigerants. For instance, if a new outdoor unit (typically called a "condensing unit," containing the condenser and compressor) is installed, it is likely that a new indoor unit (typically called an "evaporator") will also be required.

What does any of this mean to you as a buyer or

agent? When you see on the disclosure statement of an older home that the air conditioning system is one-year-old, how would you know if both the evaporator coil and condensing unit are compatible with each other and operating effectively? Current service records, if available, would provide that information. The service records would describe what procedures were performed to insure the air conditioning system will function properly. No service records? No disclosure statement? Then it's a good idea to have a licensed HVAC technician evaluate the air conditioning system and provide proper documentation describing the configuration of the system.

For the most part, repairs or replacements of older components of the air conditioning system have been properly performed by licensed HVAC technicians, but not always. For example, a one-year-old condenser I inspected had been installed with a 23-year-old evaporator coil. Conditions suggested that the installation was not performed by a licensed HVAC technician. Service records could not be produced. As it turns out, the new condenser was put in place and the evaporator was never modified or replaced. This

air conditioning system needed a new evaporator coil that would match the new condenser.

In the future, all residential air conditioners will eventually be converted to this 13 SEER rating. Until then, we need to be diligent during this transition period to protect ourselves and our clients.

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