

Duct Cleaning? Good value or a waste of money?

From the EPA's website:

Duct cleaning has never been shown to actually prevent health problems. Neither do studies conclusively demonstrate that particle (e.g., dust) levels in homes increase because of dirty air ducts or go down after cleaning. This is because much of the dirt that may accumulate inside air ducts adheres to duct surfaces and does not necessarily enter the living space. It is important to keep in mind that dirty air ducts are only one of many possible sources of particles that are present in homes. Pollutants that enter the home both from outdoors and indoor activities such as cooking, cleaning, smoking, or just moving around can cause greater exposure to contaminants than dirty air ducts. Moreover, there is no evidence that a light amount of household dust or other particulate matter in air ducts poses any risk to health.

EPA does not recommend that air ducts be cleaned except on an as-needed basis because of the continuing uncertainty about the benefits of duct cleaning under most circumstances. EPA does, however, recommend that if you have a fuel burning furnace, stove, or fireplace, they be inspected for proper functioning and serviced before each heating season to protect against carbon monoxide poisoning. Some research also suggests that cleaning dirty cooling coils, fans and heat exchangers can improve the efficiency of heating and cooling systems. However, little evidence exists to indicate that simply cleaning the duct system will increase your system's efficiency.

Reply by [Ed Voytovich](#) on November 25, 2011 at 1:48pm

Based on the results of my own duct cleaning that was done by a highly competent and meticulous team I would strongly recommend the service in older houses, houses with pets, and houses where occupants have respiratory issues.

My house was build in 1928 and was originally heated by a coal fired gravity furnace. Nobody ever thought to clean the ducts. The cleaning by a skilled and knowledgeable team yielded almost a garbage can full of crud, coal dust, generic dust, dust bunnies, dust elephants, papers, Christmas tree needles, small kids' toys, animal fir, cigarette butts, anything that 80 years worth of cats could knock down a cold air return, and one mummified mouse.

I then installed a Photronic air cleaner with a MERV 11 pleated media filter, an electrostatic collector, and UV lights (the jury is out on whether the lights were a worthwhile investment). By vacuuming out the cold air returns and floor registers periodically and generally keeping an eye on things, the ducts may not have to be cleaned again for another 80 years.

I suspect that routine maintenance by homeowners could postpone the need for cleaning for a good long time, that cleaning ducts in newer homes is not worth it unless there are unusual circumstances, and that there is no such thing as a \$199 duct cleaning.

The guys who did my house spent a full day with a custom system that they built themselves. Thanks, Herb. And, yes, I did feel sorry for the mouse.

My comments of 10 days ago still stand. Note that the EPA says

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and that there are certainly times when ducts should be cleaned. They are not talking just energy, but the need to clean ducts at all. The fact that your 83 old ducts had all that stuff in them means that the stuff was not in the air. The only time cleaning would be critical is when the stuff in the ducts got thick enough to affect the air flow.

Here is something that I have witnessed/noticed twice in 31 years: When doing duct analysis I turn on the system fan to the air conditioning speed in the spring. All winter the lower fan speed has been in effect and a certain amount of stuff has fallen out of the duct stream at that speed. The faster speed makes a little puff of dust come out of the register just once - then no more.

So stuff that has accumulated in the ducts wants to stay there, and if there is no moisture in the ducts to make things grow - the usual case - then there is no need to clean the ducts.

But people have to make themselves comfortable.

Ed Minch

Reply by [Robert H](#) on December 22, 2012 at 7:39pm

Bob 4 inch filters are not a better filter, they have more surface area and last longer. If you look at the MERV rating of the 4 in filters they are in the range of an 8 or 10. That is mid level filtering.

Furnace filters are a balance of filtering and air flow. The more filtering the less air flow. Air flow is measured in static pressure. The better the filter the higher the static pressure which equate to lower air flow. This will result in a decrease in efficiency.