

Certification—A Consumer Purchasing Tool

(NAPSA)—Many consumers are at a loss when hiring a heating or air-conditioning contractor, because they don't know how to differentiate a good one from a bad one. Doing a little homework makes you better informed. Many consumers use technician certification as an indicator.

Things the savvy consumer should consider:

- What does the Better Business Bureau have to say about the contractor? A single good or bad report may not indicate continual business practices, but several similar reports may.

- Does the contractor advertise? What does his ad say?

- Does he belong to any trade associations?

- Are contractors in the state, county or city licensed? Is proof of technician certification or training a part of the licensing process?

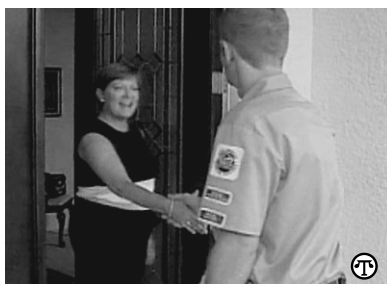
- Get multiple contractor quotes and compare apples to apples when reviewing them. If you're not sure about something, ask for clarification.

- Ask for references and follow up on them. Ask about the level of satisfaction each customer has—and ask if they would use that contractor again.

- Homeowner impressions are important. Did the contractor push for a quick decision? Did they give enough facts to make an informed decision? Make decisions based on solid, comparative information.

- The lowest quote may be from a contractor with the least-knowledgeable technicians...or from one who buys materials in bulk. Find out which.

- You pay for quality. If a contractor is more expensive, he may have the best-qualified technicians—sometimes a slightly more expensive quote saves in the long run, because homeowners won't have to call the contractor back to correct a problem.



Doing a little homework when choosing a heating or cooling contractor can save you money and reduce problems.

- Does the contractor have NATE-certified technicians? Professionals passing a NATE test have proven they have the heating and air-conditioning knowledge to do the job right. Other technicians can say they are good, but NATE certification proves it. Contractors employing NATE-certified professionals are usually listed on the Consumer Contractor Connection at www.natex.org. Technicians' wallet cards verify their certification status.

A consumer's best tool is asking questions and then using the knowledge gained to identify a contractor who best suits their needs. NATE certification is a consumer's best assurance of technician knowledge because it means a technician has passed a rigorous test to demonstrate that he or she knows heating and cooling. Every branch of the heating and cooling industry advocates NATE certification. Manufacturers support it. The Department of Energy endorses it. Most importantly, 88 percent of homeowners want it. Certification is a homeowner's primary differentiation criterion because NATE-certified professionals are the best the industry has to offer. To find contractors with NATE-certified heating and cooling professionals, go to www.natex.org and click on the question mark. Choosing a contractor no longer has to be a blind decision.