

Hot Water Heaters

Thanks to Frank Stabile who wrote in and asked me the following questions about water heaters. Remember, I rely on my past experience and the www (World Wide Web) to gather the information to write all these articles. I do my best but please do your own research also. Frank says the community is almost 10 years old and each of us has a hot water tank which is probably due for replacement. Since this is the winter season, it seems appropriate that you might discuss the pros and cons of replacing this tank, covering such topics as:

a. Considering the different size homes, how does one choose the replacement size; should it be increased or kept to the same size?

Ans. Well...depends. Do you use the Jacuzzi tub? Do you like to take extra long showers? If you do you should probably stay with the size the builder supplied, probably a 50 or 60 gallon tank. It will also pipe up very close to what you have. If you don't use the tub that much and take a normal shower a 40 gallon is plenty for two to four people. If you think your existing heater is not giving you what you want make sure the temperature is up high enough. Downsizing is usually pretty simple but if you are going for a bigger or newer model with more insulation, measure first to make sure it will fit in the space. Most water heaters are sold by the gallon capacity. But a water heater's first-hour rating (FHR) is more important, since it tells you how much hot water the heater can deliver in an hour of use. By the way, in case you are wondering, gas heaters are much more efficient than electric heaters.

b. Which manufacturing companies have the best " track record" for dependability and service?

Ans. – Okay, this is not all inclusive but the leading brands are Rheem, Sears, State, AO Smith, American and Whirlpool. Sometimes I think one of those companies is making them for the others. They all look alike to me.

c. Does it matter if one has baseboard heating or hot water heating?

Ans. – If you have baseboard (hot water) heating, you should be set for a long, long time unless there is a defect in your tank. The tanks with this system do not have flames or smoke flues to corrode the outside or crack the lining or the tank itself. The water in these tanks is heated by a coil that has hot water from the furnace circulated through it. Very little goes wrong with them, just drain a little off the bottom occasionally.

d. What kind of warranties should the homeowner look for?

Ans. - Look for a long warranty. Most cover 6, 9, or 12 years. Heaters with the lowest and highest warranties differ by just \$50 to \$100 for gas units. But there can be much bigger differences inside. Most higher-warranty gas heaters have bigger burners and better heat transfer for faster water heating, along with more anode material and thicker insulation. Some models

are identical inside though and you are actually paying more for the insurance. Longer coverage is especially important considering that warranties typically cover only the heater, not the \$200 to \$300 you'll pay a plumber to install a new one. And the warranty is pro-rated. In other words if you have a 12 year warranty and the tank lets go in 10 years, you will only get about an 18% credit on a new one.

e. About how much money would it cost to install?

Ans. – If it is the same size and pipes up easily, I would say about \$250 to \$300.

f. How would one know if it has to be replaced?

Ans. – The only real way is for the tank to start leaking. If your neighbors start to have problems you may want to jump the gun and renew. I bought a house at the shore in 1984 and the 40 gallon tank was not new by any means and I should have changed it out, but I had other priorities. I kept meaning to change it but something else always came up. Some 15 or 16 years later when I was selling that house and the house on Staten Island to move to the Fairways, the prospective buyer wanted me to put in a new tank before we closed. I refused. I said to myself I went all those years without replacing it and I wasn't going to do it now when I was moving out. He gave in, we closed and two days later the tank let go. Oh well.

g. Are there maintenance items that a homeowner can do to help with upkeep?

Ans. – Yes. The most important is to drain the bottom sediment from the tank twice a year. Built up sediment can cause areas of the glass lined tank to overheat and crack. The drain valve at the bottom of the tank is plastic so treat it tenderly and do not use pliers to turn it. Drain into a pan or bucket that fits easily under the valve. Remember, the water is HOT! Just drain a little off until the water is clear. This requires bending over so be careful! Also while you are down there make sure the burner top is clear of any scale that may have fallen from the flue. The only other problem is the temperature sensor bulb that may fail and cause your pilot light to go out. This is a low cost item, but again requires bending over for quite a while removing and replacing.

You may have heard about tankless water heaters, which save energy by heating only the water you draw. Those savings can add up to some \$50 per year compared with conventional heaters. But even at that rate, it will take more than 25 years for an average household to recoup the extra \$1,300 or so those units cost to buy, install, and maintain.

See my Hot Water Heater Maintenance Article from Jan. 07 at http://aaazz.net/HotWaterHeaterArticle_b.pdf

This and previous Around the House articles can be retrieved on the web at <http://www.aaazz.net/id5.html>

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