

## A Fall Furnace Primer

### Part 1 of 2 - Air Filters

Beautiful September weather does little to remind us that winter's cold breath will soon be upon us. While you're in the basement unpacking the Halloween costumes, take a moment to consider your furnace.

#### Check the Switches

While it is probably okay, it's not a bad idea to stroll over to your breaker panel and make sure the breaker marked "Furnace" is on. If your A/C was on recently, you can rest assured the breaker is okay. Then head back to the furnace and look for the switch that controls the electricity to the unit.

Most furnaces have a switch that looks like a light switch controlling the electrical supply. In a new house, the switch is often on a wall or a support about 6 feet above the floor, near the furnace. In an older house, the switch is often on the basement ceiling, or high on a wall, near the bottom of the basement stairs. This allows you to shut off the furnace quickly in the event of an emergency, without having to get near the furnace.

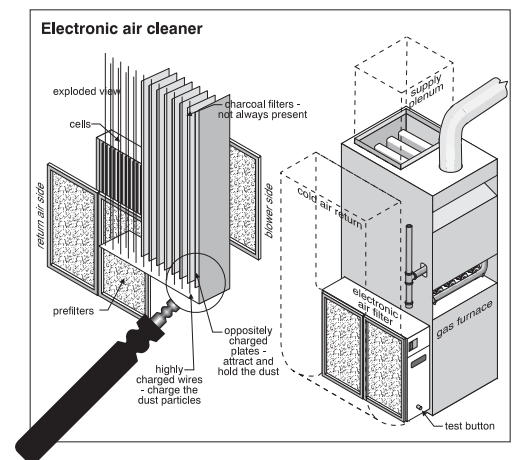
Now that you finally know what that mystery switch is, check to see if it is ON. If not, the heat will not come on no matter how high you set the thermostat. It is embarrassing to write a \$75 cheque for a technician to come to your house and flip a switch.

It's now time to focus on the two primary maintenance jobs for furnace owners: the air filter and the humidifier. We'll talk about the air filter now and save the humidifier for the next issue.

#### The Air Filter

When the outside air makes its way inside, pollutants like dust, dander and spores are added to the air which has already been exposed to urban car exhaust, smog, dirt and pollen. The result is a thick, soupy haze... that is entirely normal. While most people aren't bothered by the usual level of air-borne particulates, some are more sensitive, and everyone is affected if the level becomes excessive. To remove many of the larger particles from the air, your furnace is equipped with a filter.

Most filters are simply screens of paper, metal or plastic mesh that allow air through but trap most of the dirt. Some of these are thicker for more surface area, and some have specially treated media. Electronic air filters use electricity to electrostatically attract even smaller particles.



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