

IAQ by Gord Cooke

IAQ Opportunities



Most of your customers don't even know that there are issues with their air quality that can be solved by professional HVAC contractors. It is absolutely critical that when doing in-home sales visits whether for service or sales, HVAC personnel have their eyes and, most importantly, their nose open to receive clues of IAQ issues in a client's home. Start with the knowledge that all houses, new or old, tight or loose, need provisions for some amount of mechanical ventilation. It is no longer possible for natural air leakage / ventilation to provide adequate air quality control in our homes. We have added far more pollutants to our homes – pets, plants, plastics, computers, moisture and we spend far more time indoors. When you visit a customer's home you bring a fresh nose to help them uncover issues their nose has become acclimatized to.

If you smell damp, musty odors help your customers look for moisture problems and resolve them with the assistance of ventilation and dehumidification. If you smell scented candles or air fresheners help your customers discover the benefits of removing odors via ventilation rather than just masking them. Of course, there are a wide array of odors you might notice and then dozens of possible visual clues of air quality problems you will discover in many older homes as soon as you are committed to the overwhelming evidence that all houses need provisions for at least some type of mechanical ventilation.

Air Conditioning and Ventilation

This newsletter will find most HVAC contractors in the throws of the busy air conditioning season. It is important to remember that air conditioning is relatively new to the housing market and it changes dramatically the way houses work. On a very simple level homeowners used to rely on natural ventilation as a cooling strategy and as a result helped ensure adequate air quality throughout the summer months. This is why we originally thought of ventilation and HRVs as a winter only requirement. In fact, because homeowners don't use windows as much as they used to (in any season) and because air quality – both indoor and outdoor – is generally worse in the summer, when quoting AC systems HVAC contractors need to remind homeowners of air quality issues. AC does provide an excellent opportunity for homeowners to control the quality of air in their home by closing windows and avoid bringing in too much of the hot, humid outside air and its associated dust and pollen pollutants. This makes ventilation and specifically energy recovery ventilation a perfect match with air conditioning; limit uncontrollable natural ventilation and add back just the right amount of fresh filtered air that has been conditioned by the ERV to optimize energy savings and moisture content of the air. In many cases homeowners are prompted to consider air conditioning because someone in the household suffers from respiratory problems. Certainly these clients and many others need to be properly educated on air quality and what a professional HVAC contractors role is in ensuring the healthiest possible indoor air for households. Include a conversation about IAQ and ventilation on all your AC calls this summer.

IAQ Tools

As you approach the busy fall heating season remember to take the right tools to every sales call. Of course you need brochures, quote forms, business cards, demonstration tools and ample enthusiasm. There may be other technical tools of the trade you find useful like flashlights, inspection mirrors, hand tools to access equipment and thermometers. In addition, let me suggest a few tools to help your customers resolve air quality problems they might not even know they have.

The most important tool is your nose. On every call you bring a "fresh" nose to the customer's home. While it might seem a tad offense to say "boy it sure stinks in here", you can be very helpful if you mention that you detect a musty smell or a chemical smell. You can say things like "I'm curious, can you tell me you feel the need to use a plug in air freshener". You will be surprised by the conversations you will spur by gently reminding them of odours they may have become used to.

Another important tool is a hygrometer. Since relative humidity is such an important factor in comfort and air quality, you need to help clients take control of it. But first you need to measure it and thereby focus their attention on it. Window condensation is often a great indicator of high humidity levels but only during cold weather and even then people often assume it's a window problem and not a ventilation opportunity. Buy a good hygrometer. Traditional sling psychrometers are excellent but a little fiddly to use. There are inexpensive digital hygrometers available at electronics stores such as Radio Shack or The Source. Your favorite wholesaler will also carry more accurate and faster responding hygrometers.

So as you head out for sales call this fall carrying a hygrometer and being keenly aware of the smells you encounter will help you help your customer improve the air in their homes. Have a great fall season.

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Special Contributor