

As Temps Heat Up, Don't Get Burned by an HVAC Contractor

Record-breaking temperatures are expected this time of year, and overloaded air conditioning systems can set the stage for shady sales tactics and unreliable contractors.

The potential for record-breaking temperatures may put a strain on air conditioners, and therefore put families at risk for air conditioning repair scams. The members of the Bucks County Crimes Against Older Adults Task Force encourage consumers to search for a reputable service company and follow the tips below to avoid high-pressure sales tactics and unneeded or costly repairs.

When the air conditioning unit goes out, consumers are desperate to get it repaired quickly! Consumers need to do their homework and know their rights to make sure that they don't get "hot under the collar" because of a shady air conditioning repair company.

The following tips may help you to avoid "not so cool" HVAC repair contractors:

- Take some time before calling for service to check a few basic things. Is the electrical breaker tripped? Is your thermostat operating? Are the filters on your unit dirty or blocked and need to be cleaned? If it's minor, you might be able to fix it yourself. Always ask the contractor if there's a diagnostic/service fee.
- Check warranty coverage - Your air conditioner might still be under the manufacturer's warranty. Be sure to check your owner's manual or warranty to avoid unnecessarily paying for repairs that might be covered.
- Do not be an easy target. Ask to see a contractor's license and verify it by calling 717-772-2425, or check it on the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General website: www.hicsearch.attorneygeneral.gov/ or email hic@attorneygeneral.gov.
- Research contractors with the Bucks County Consumer Protection Department to see if they have any complaints on file against a particular company.
- Look up third-party review sites over the company's own webpage. Give more weight to a company with many good reviews over a multi-year period.
- Obtain multiple bids for extensive repairs. Try to solicit at least two or three bids on large projects. Find out the proper size unit to cool your home and the energy efficiency of a new unit.
- Get all estimates in writing. Prior to any sale, obtain a written contract of the equipment and services the company is selling and review thoroughly before signing. Do not sign anything that you don't agree to or that feels "wrong" to you.
- Know your rights: Be wary if a contractor uses a sense of urgency in their selling methods. Some dishonest contractors may use high-pressure tactics to recommend repairs and replacements that are not actually needed.

For additional consumer protection tips and brochures, including the PA Home Improvement Contractor Law booklet, visit the Bucks County Consumer Protection website at www.buckscounty.gov and search "Consumer Tips." If you believe you have been the victim of an air conditioning repair scam or any other type of consumer fraud, please contact the BCCP office at 215-348-6060.

Monthly Fraud Alerts brought to you by:

Bucks County Crimes Against Older Adults Task Force	
Bucks County District Attorney's Office: 215-348-6344	A Woman's Place (AWP): 1-800-220-8116
Bucks County Area Agency on Aging: 267-880-5700	Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection: 215-348-6060
Bucks County Coroner's Office: 215-348-3852	Bucks County Register of Wills: 215-348-6265
Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA): 1-800-675-6900	US Dept. of Health and Human Services/OIG: 1-800-447-8477
www.buckscounty.gov/CrimesAgainstOlderAdults 24 - HOUR HOTLINE: 1-800-490-8505	