

## SEASONAL SHIFT

### The Highs and Lows of Home Comfort

Cooling your home can take quite a bit of your cold, hard cash. And the air conditioner itself – based on its age, condition and energy-efficiency rating – has a lot to do with whether you're spending more or less.

Central air conditioners are not created equal, and you see the differences in the SEER, a rating standard for "seasonal energy efficiency ratio". The higher the SEER, the better the energy efficiency.

Air conditioners are significant investments for any home. Plus, there's the operational costs. Overall, you'll want to look for a balanced investment – comparing the air conditioner's cost with your monthly operational savings. Here's your range of options:

- **High/Low** – Yes, they cost more upfront, but they also save more. Many homeowners prefer the logic of a higher upfront cost that saves them months after on their energy dollars. For high-efficiency central air conditioners, you'll look for 16 to 23 SEER.

- **Mid** – When you see SEER 14.5 to 17, you're in mid-range efficiency for central air conditioners. They're priced a little lower than the higher efficiency units and have a few less benefits. If you're replacing an air conditioner that's more than 12 to 15 years old, this would seem like top of the line by comparison.
- **Low/High** – Minimum energy efficiency comes in a 13 to 14.5 SEER air conditioner. The lower initial cost won't bring as high a level of savings on the operational costs, but many homeowners on a tight budget will consider this to be a good value.

#### What's right for your home?

Give us a call or email us at [customerservice@obhc.com](mailto:customerservice@obhc.com) to get our free report *Maximizing Energy Efficiency*. As a customer of **Outer Banks Heating & Cooling**, we'd also be glad to come out and give you a free Energy Survey. Just give us a call.

## MY WORD

### The Future

By Brian J. McDonald

Hello Friends,  
Do you ever get the feeling that real life sometimes seems a little more like science fiction?



Our smartphones are smarter than we are. Our cars tell us where to go – and will even caution us if we've made a turn they didn't recommend. Wherever we go, we can carry as many books with us as we want, without breaking a sweat, thanks to eBook readers. Yes, time and technology marches on. In a lot of ways, that's a good thing.

In this business, for example, we have seen incredible advances in home comfort systems over the years. For someone like me, who truly appreciates equipment that is the top of its kind, I'm impressed all the time by improvements in energy efficiency, convenience and comfort. And I love to see the faces of happy customers when they first "feel" this difference in their own homes.

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## Have You Heard of QR Codes?

If you've had any internet experience, you've used links that take you from one webpage to another. But now a bit of technology is changing the way you can interact with the web. If you have a phone with a camera that can access the Internet, you can now link from a physical object – say, this very newsletter – and go straight to a website. How?

The technology is called QR codes (Quick Response). The QR code looks similar to a barcode you'd see on any product you buy. Instead of straight lines, however, you'll see a square filled in with varying patterns that contain digital information. With QR codes you can receive weather forecasts, news updates, "discount" alerts or other types of info from the codes you choose to scan. **You can get started by trying out the QR code on the back of this newsletter.**

For the QR code to work, however, you'll need a QR code reader installed on your phone. That's easy. A free code scanner is available at [www.neoreader.com](http://www.neoreader.com) and other locations on the web (just Google QR Code Reader from your smartphone). Once your code reader is installed and you begin scanning QR codes, you can download contact information and other details directly to your phone, making it easy to access and pocket-portable.

## MONEYWISE

### Home Improvements That Pay Off (or Turn Off)

Home values have slumped and the stock market is a rocky ride, but some investments can still increase value while enriching your quality of life. Certain home improvements are likely to improve the value of your home – and, hopefully, make it more attractive to a buyer down the road. But strategy helps – because some home improvements don't improve home value and can even lessen the ability to sell.

**Some home improvements don't improve home value and can even lessen the ability to sell.**

So where's the payoff and what's the turn off? Most experts say making changes in the kitchen and bathroom are a "go" and can earn homeowners an 80% and upward return on investment for remodeling projects.

**Kitchen Remodeling** – The kitchen is the center of family activity and the most-used room in the house. Some of the areas where you can give attention are new plumbing fixtures, energy-efficient appliances, solid surface countertops, tile flooring and recessed lighting.

**Bathroom Remodeling** – Investments in a bathroom remodel are also viewed favorably. You can start with the plumbing where it is and replace outdated fixtures, maybe tub and toilet too. Other areas include updated lighting, tile floors and vanity.

**Outdoors** – Adding a deck or patio yields a good return – a covered patio in particular.

Landscaping is still a great bet too. It adds value and can be done with limited budget. Also, landscaping in the front adds that ever-attractive "curb appeal" that will impress your friends and neighbors and entice a future buyer.

Some areas of improvement, however, don't tend to yield a good return on investment. What areas are a "no"? A swimming pool could deter a significant pool of future buyers.

Also, while an outdoor kitchen is attractive and enjoyable, it's not the way to cook up a higher home value. Look for the "home value" caution flag in these areas too: converting a garage into a family room and converting a spare bedroom to an office.

Another upside of making home improvements now is that the cost may be less, starting with a low interest rate on a home equity line of credit. Additionally, contractors that aren't as busy as they once were may offer a discounted price, and home building materials that aren't as much in demand may be available at a better price.

### "Quotable"

*"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant; if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome."*

– Anne Bradstreet

## Poison Prevention Begins with Smart Practices

**A**s you spruce up your lawn or garden for the greener days to come, you'll find many elements that you'd be pleased to see eradicated – like weeds and pests. But the poisons and chemicals that take care of business at hand can cause serious problems if they end up where they're not intended.

Following these guidelines from the Home Safety Council can help keep your family and your pets safe:

- **Read the labels of products you buy and keep in your home.** If you see the words, "Caution," "Warning," "Danger," "Poison" or "Keep Out of Reach of Children," be very careful.
- **Store poisons in a place where children cannot see or touch them.** Use child safety locks. Products you should keep locked up include: pesticides, automotive fluids, charcoal lighter, paint thinner, antifreeze and turpentine. Ideally, hazardous products should be stored in a locking cabinet.
- **Keep products in the container they came in.** Do not put them in a different bottle or jar.
- **Do not mix products together** because their contents could react together with dangerous results.
- **Gasoline is very dangerous inside a home or garage.** Gasoline vapors can explode with just a tiny spark. Never bring or use gasoline indoors. Use it as motor fuel only. If you must keep gasoline at home, use a special safety container.
- When using harsh products, **follow directions.** For example, use gloves, eye goggles and masks if the label says so.
- Pesticides to kill bugs, mice and rats are extremely dangerous. If possible, **have a professional help you.**
- **Mix insect sprays outdoors, away from areas used by your family and pets.**
- **Pool chemicals are poisonous and can catch on fire.** Store and use pool chemicals according to the manufacturer's directions. Keep them tightly covered in the containers they came in. Keep them dry and away from other chemicals and products.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The phrase "sleep tight" derives from the fact that early mattresses were filled with straw and held up with rope stretched across the bedframe. A tight sleep was a comfortable sleep.
- The liquid inside young coconuts can be used as substitute for blood plasma.
- A raisin dropped in a fresh glass of soda will bounce up and down continually from the bottom of the glass to the top.
- An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain.



### Clear the Air

**W**hen we think air pollution, we think smoggy cities and urban areas, while in reality, it is the air in our own homes that can aggravate allergies and damage our health. These tips can help you combat airborne irritants in your home:

- **Use an air cleaner that combines HEPA technology** and carbon air filtration to clear tobacco smoke, pet hair and dander, dust mites, molds, bacteria and pollen.
- **Improve your home's ventilation.** Keep inside doors open. Use the vents in your kitchen and bathrooms whenever cooking and showering. Open windows when the weather permits.
- **Control moisture.** Mold is major indoor allergen. Keep firewood outdoors. It releases moisture in the warm indoor environment.

If your duct work is not properly installed, maintained and operated, the components may become contaminated with particles of dust, pollen, insects and other debris. Please let us know how we can help you with your indoor air quality. We'd be happy to come perform a free Indoor Air Quality Survey. Just give us a call.

## MY WORD (...from page 1)

If your system is showing signs of age, we'll be glad to talk with you about some terrific options. Just give us a call.

In the meantime, we're committed to helping you keep your current system

operating at its best – and regular tune-ups are the best way we can help make that happen.

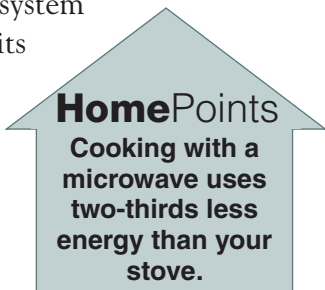
If you'll call and schedule your spring tune-up, we'll get someone out and help you get ready for the warmer days that are on their way.

Best wishes for an enjoyable season. Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Brian J. McDonald

P.S. Check out the special offers on this page. If you're not able to use them, feel free to pass them on to a friend or neighbor. Find us on Facebook!

**facebook**



## BREATHING DUCT YUCK?

Your air ducts can circulate some pretty yucky things in your home. Have you had them cleaned lately?

Dust and particles can accumulate within the ducts, and they could be host to clumps of mold. You may not see this happening, but you could feel some pretty common symptoms: headaches, sinus irritation, sneezing.

Let us give you a free indoor air quality inspection to see if your ducts need cleaning. You'll breathe easier just knowing we were there. Call **Outer Banks Heating & Cooling at (252) 441-1740.**

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## HUMIDITY IS NOT A VERY "HOMEY" FEELING, IS IT?

If that "sticky and uncomfortable" feeling is not just outside the home – but inside as well – you've got two choices: 1) put up with it; or 2) get rid of it. So stop settling for "cold and clammy" or "hot and sweaty" as the best you can do. It's not. Call **Outer Banks Heating & Cooling at (252) 441-1740** about dehumidifiers. And we'll get you out of this sticky situation.

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## If I didn't know any better, I'd say I'm crazy to help you maintain your air conditioning system.

You see, if your system conks out at an inconvenient time (like one of those really hot days when it feels like it's 110 degrees in the shade), I'd probably be able to convince you pretty quickly that you need a brand new system, like, now! But that's not what friends do!

Instead, friends let you know that performing routine maintenance on a system keeps it operating more efficiently (saving you on energy dollars) while it also helps maintain the life of the system (saving you

on the cost of an upgrade before it's time). So, if I can save you the hassle of breakdowns and hold down those soaring energy costs, I figure you and I are going to be friends for awhile. And on that future day when you do need a new system, you'll give me a call, and I'll help you out. In the meantime, call us for your Spring tune-up and help me help you keep your system running better for longer! Call **Outer Banks Heating & Cooling at (252) 441-1740** today!

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**HOMESENSE**