Flood Impact on HVAC Systems

According to the Air-Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration Institute (AHRI), the trade association representing HVAC and water heating equipment, homeowners are instructed to take important safety precautions after a flood or hurricane with regard to their heating and cooling equipment. The association advises homeowners that standing water can severely damage a home's heating and cooling equipment and recommends that flood-damaged HVAC equipment be replaced, rather than repaired. **Because manufacturers' warranties do not cover failure or damage due to floods, winds, fires, lightning, accidents, corrosive environments (rust, etc.) or other conditions beyond the control of the company, we recommend that you contact any of the offices set up by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as government aid may be available to help flood victims finance the replacement of flood-damaged HVAC equipment. Please visit www.fema.gov for information.**

If HVAC equipment has been submerged or damaged by flood water, it is recommended that all inspection and replacement work be done by a qualified contractor and not the homeowner. Furthermore, not only is gas equipment at risk, but that risk includes units using oil and electricity as the power source, which should be left to professionals to inspect.

Please review the following information about home HVAC equipment and take necessary precautions to have that equipment inspected, as well as repaired or replaced, by qualified professional contractors.

Heat Pumps and Air Conditioners:

Split air conditioning and heat pump systems have power and control wiring between the indoor and outdoor parts of the system, and piping through which refrigerant flows through the system. If flood water has caused either the outdoor or indoor units of a split system to become repositioned, even by a small amount, there is a potential for refrigerant leaks. The system will then require major repair or full replacement.

If the refrigerant system remains intact after the flood, the entire system should be cleaned, dried, and disinfected. Homeowners should have a contractor check the indoor and outdoor units' electrical and refrigeration connections, including all control circuits. The decision to repair or replace should be made after consultation with a qualified professional on a case-by-case basis.

Gas Furnaces and Boilers:

If there is any concern that flood water has reached a gas furnace or boiler, it should be inspected by a qualified HVAC contractor. Furnaces and boilers feature gas valves and controls that are particularly susceptible to water damage. While the damage might not be visible, corrosion begins inside the valves and controls, even if the outside appears to be clean and dry. At the very least, this damage can result in reliability issues.

Ductwork:

If a house that has incurred flood damage contains a central forced-air system, it is important to also closely inspect the ductwork. Duct insulation that has been in contact with flood water should not be salvaged, as it is impossible to decontaminate. A qualified contractor can clean, dry and disinfect the ductwork; and a thorough job requires disassembling the ductwork all together.

Commercial Equipment:

Commercial equipment – packaged units, rooftops, air handlers, etc. – are subject to the same issues as residential equipment, so the same guidelines should be observed. If there is any concern that flood water has reached commercial HVAC equipment, it should be inspected by a qualified HVAC contractor. While damage might not be visible, corrosion begins inside the unit, even if the outside appears to be clean and dry.

Please make sure to have a qualified contractor inspect any HVAC equipment that has been submerged or damaged by flood.

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