

R22 Refrigerant Phase Out Affects Majority of Home Owners By Tim De Stasio

As expected, a reduction of R22 refrigerant produced has been announced by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The total amount of virgin R22 refrigerant produced in 2017 will be 30% less than what was allowed last year.

This has caused the wholesale price of R22 to increase by a significant amount. This cost is passed on to the end user- the owner of HVAC equipment that uses R22. This is part of an eventual phase-out of R22 which will be complete in 2020. Since 2012, no new HVAC equipment has been manufactured with R22. New systems use R410a, a more environmentally friendly refrigerant.

This should greatly affect the decision making process and planning for anyone who owns HVAC equipment with R22. Contractors should be addressing this phase- out with their customers already. If your HVAC system was installed before 2012, this most likely affects you.

For an R22 system 10 years old or less that leaks refrigerant and requires refilling every year, usually the best plan is to locate the leak, repair it and fill the system back up. Usually, the leak is in the indoor coil- which will need to be replaced. While this repair can be somewhat costly, because the system has many more years of service left, it is still better to repair rather than replace. Always use a NATE certified HVAC technician to perform the repairs to ensure they are done correctly, legally and in an environmentally responsible manner.

For an aging R22 system that leaks, a plan for prompt replacement should be in effect. With many service providers charging well over \$100 *per pound* of R22 alone (not including labor and other costs), to simply "top off" the charge can be very costly. And investing in a major repair of the system is most likely not worth the expense with an older system. That money would be better put towards a new system with R410a.



"Don't wait until the heat of summer comes to make a decision to replace your system. "

Any time refrigerant is added to a system, our company policy is to leak check using an electronic refrigerant detector and document it. An option to repair the leak is given along with a recommendation to repair or replace based on the above mentioned criteria.

If an existing system does not leak, then it should be under a Preventative Maintenance Service Agreement to ensure its efficient and safe operation and detect any leaks that may develop in the future.

I get questions about whether there is a “drop in” replacement for R22. There are some products that are available to replace R22 without a major overhaul of the HVAC system, but many of them have not had good reviews in industry tests. Therefore, I do not recommend retrofitting a residential system to any R22 drop- in replacement.

The phase- out of R22 is imminent. Don't wait until the heat of summer comes to make a decision to replace your system. Plan a replacement during cooler times of the year when you won't be forced to make a quick decision without proper thought. If you wait until the heat of summer, you may be forced to either wait several weeks for your preferred contractor to do the work or to hire a less trusted or more expensive contractor who happens to be available on short notice. Those decisions should not be made hastily, without forethought. For more information, contact us.

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