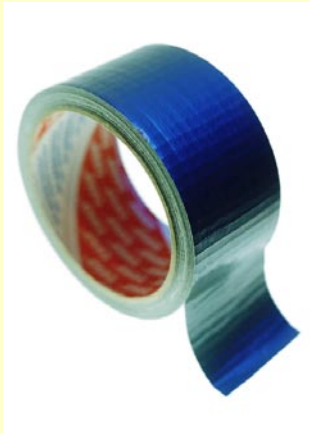


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# HOUSE WISE

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## Just Lookin for a Little Warmth

*By Elizabeth Guinn*

So, just how old is your heating and air system? Hmm. Don't know? The average HVAC system for the Hampton Roads area is the standard heat pump system. If yours is approaching 10 years of age then you should start putting a little money aside for a replacement one because you have just reached the point at which most heat pumps need to be replaced. Of course, these figures vary depending on how often you change the filters and what kind of routine maintenance you have had done over the years.

If you are considering a replacement HVAC system or think yours might be coming to the end of it's useful life, it's time for you to start doing your research. The last thing you want is to have the thing die on you and not be in a position to make an informed decision on what type of system you want to replace it with.

If you have had a standard heat pump, live in a house that

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## Dan's Desk – Back To School Blues

*By Dan Guinn*

It's September, all the local school systems have either just started or are about to start and it just feels like I'm missing out on something. I have bought and hauled supplies hours away to place one child back in college making sure she had all she needed to succeed. We also had to participate in the tax free weekend and buy all kinds of new clothes and back to school supplies for the other two kids. (By the way, why to home schooler's need back to school clothes anyway?) Everybody is getting new stuff but me!

So I decided it was time for some back to school tools!

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is roughly 2500 s. f. and have a family of say 4 or 5 people, then you have been spending around \$1500 per year to heat and cool your house. What if I could recommend a system that would cost less than half that a year to operate? Would you be interested? Well, have I got the system for you.

We have been doing some research into a system called an Envision manufactured by Water Furnace ([www.waterfurnace.com](http://www.waterfurnace.com)). This heat exchanger is a geothermal system. This is the point where most people start back pedaling because everyone knows geothermal systems are way too expensive, right? Wrong.

Let's define exactly what a geothermal system is first of all. Geo thermal means that when temperatures fluctuate here on the surface of the earth, the ground just under the surface remains largely the same temperature and can feel warmer than the air in the winter or cooler in the summer. The Envision system takes advantage of this disparity in temperature by running a loop of flexible pipe under the ground filled with a water and anti-freeze mix.

The pipes are between 4 and 6 feet under the ground and can run between 100 to 400 feet in length. The interesting part is that these pipes can be horizontal (which is cheaper), sunk vertically into the ground like a well or even laid in the bottom of a lake or pond if you happen to have one nearby. So even if your lot space is limited you can still take advantage of this technology.

What makes this technology attractive? Let's start with the fact that a geothermal system has efficiency ratings that are 5 or 6 times better than the average heat pump. Your heat pump probably has a SEER rating of 10, the Envision has an EER of 30. Another attractive benefit is the lack of noise. At our house, we have two heat pumps that reside on small decks behind the house. When we were building the house, we went back and forth on just where to place the two outside units. We finally decided to hide them best as we could near the master bathroom. We can still hear them in the master bedroom and in the office next door. The Envision system is much quieter, mainly because there is no outside unit, none at all. No noise, no platforms, nothing to cut grass around. It's worth it just for that alone.

Another selling point is the longevity of the Water Furnace products. The planned life of their systems is double of an average heat pump lasting a minimum of 20 years. A big chunk of the cost of replacing an old system is the labor. Cutting the amount of labor installing new units in

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Doesn't that sound like a good idea? The right tools for a good start just in time for fall! I've been looking around, asking subcontractor's what kind of new tools they have been purchasing, scouring trade magazine's and frequenting the isles of Lowe's to insure that you are on top of all the latest and greatest in the wonderful world of tools. I think I have a few that you will love.

The first is something for your carpenter side, the Exhumer Death Stick nail puller from Dead On Tools.

([www.deadontools.com](http://www.deadontools.com)) Even their website is intimidating. They have a complete line of framing hammers and finish hammers but their Exhumer is what catches my eye. They have several sizes ranging from about 9 inches to almost 15 inches long so you can find one just right for any sized job. As far as cat's paw's go, the Death stick is a must have. Nothing will stay in one piece with this baby around. It also has a blade wrench built in and did I mention it has a bottle opener? This baby is slick.

I was watching some cabinetry guys recently and they were getting ready to make a huge mess sanding down a man-made solid surface countertop. Rather than send the dust flying they rolled out their Festool Dust Extractor CT 22 E. Just the name is getting you excited, right? This thing is a whole lot more than just a shopvac. It's a little more compact unit than most of your average shopvacs but still boasts a 5.7 gallon tank. I also like the fact that this little guy is no where near as loud as the old shopvac I've got sitting in the garage. But hold your horses, I haven't even gotten to the best part yet. You can plug your tools right into the Dust Extractor, hook the tool up via the dust collection ports and then, voila!!!, the entire unit becomes tool triggered. What exactly does that mean? Hook up to your sander and sand away on that countertop or floors or anything for that matter (especially nice in an occupied house), and the Dust Extractor will turn itself on and off every time you pull the trigger. That way the only time there is any noise out of this unit is when your tool is on and dust extracting is necessary. It's a great feature to be able to work a little let go of the trigger and answer the phone or talk to one of the guys in the room and then be able to go back to your work and never take your hands off the tool you're using.

The last item on my list is by far the most economical. I found it at Lowe's. It came highly recommended by an older fellow tool enthusiast who said he liked to do all his own aircraft maintenance. Whenever I go to take something apart, I grab the closest container I can find to drop the removed pieces into for later re assembly. Sometime a box, sometimes an old whip cream container, whatever I can get my hands on quickly and without upsetting my wife because she was planning of keeping it. Well



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never again will I have to wonder if someone else has plans for a certain container, I have the perfect solution. Kobalt makes a magnetic parts dish with a magnetic base strong enough to attach firmly to just about anything mechanical. The dish itself is also magnetized so all of the metal pieces parts will also become firmly attached. And that's not all, the dish has a lid that slide out of the base for long term storage needs. And did I mention that it is blue? This is essential when it comes to tools, I like blue. Get it? Blue to chase away the blues? O.K., I know it's corny, but if it gets me some new tools I'm stickin with it.

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half over the life of the house is a plus.

An average heat pump installed will run you around \$7,000. Installing an Envision will put you back a bit more adding an extra \$8,000. This may seem excessive if all you are looking at is the initial price tag. However, if you look at the difference in the operating costs, you'd see that a system could pay for itself in just a matter of a few years. The example that I read about was in the September issue of *Ultimate Home Design* magazine which discussed the installation of a geothermal system in a 2352 s. f. home in Exton, PA. The initial cost of the system was \$5200 more than a standard heat pump would have been. The owner realized an immediate monthly operating savings of \$83 which translates to \$1068 per year. The homeowner had the additional cost of his new system completely paid for in just over 4 years. After the 4 year payback period, the homeowner began realizing a monthly savings that he would not have had had he not chosen the Envision system. If you know anything about calculating rates of return on investments, you would be able to see that in this particular case the homeowner got a 21 percent ROR. I'd like to see you get this kind of ROR out of your stock market investments!

Sometimes green construction costs a little bit more, but, oh, are the returns good. If you finance this type of improvement for your home over several years, your positive cash flow will be immediate. I'm definitely short listing this product for my next construction project, I hope you are too!



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*Taking you from Dreams to Reality*  
*Psalm 127:1a*