

Hot Under the Collar

Summer is finally here! Many of us are enjoying the warm weather and sunshine, that is, until the temperature spikes. Yikes! Thank goodness for air conditioners. That is, until it stops working! Extremely high temperatures can take a toll on your A/C system, leading to emergency repair calls.

Because of the large amount of complaint calls that Bucks County Consumer Protection receives about A/C repair issues, it is strongly recommended that you perform preventative maintenance steps before the heatwave returns.

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 and quickly! Residents need to do their homework and know their rights to make sure that they stay cool and avoid hiring what could be a shady air conditioning repair company.

The following tips may help you to avoid these “not so cool” A/C 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.
- 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 your research: Research contractors with the Bucks County Consumer Protection Department to see if they have any complaints on file against a particular company. Their staff can also verify the company’s Pennsylvania Home Improvement Contractor Registration or you can visit <https://hicsearch.attorneygeneral.gov/>
- Online Reviews: Look up third-party review sites over the company’s own webpage. Give more weight to a company with hundreds of good reviews over a multi-year period. It’s not unusual to see a few negative reviews online however, most customers are likely to post a grievance rather than praise. It is a factor to consider when making your decision.
- 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 Pennsylvania Home Improvement Contractor Law booklet, visit the Bucks County Consumer Protection website at

<http://www.buckscounty.org/government/CommunityServices/ConsumerProtection/ConsumerTips>

If you believe you have been the victim of an air conditioning repair scam or any other type of consumer fraud, or would like general consumer information please contact the Bucks County Consumer Protection office at 215-348-6060.

Bucks County Crimes Against Older Adults Task Force

Bucks County District Attorney’s Office
215-348-6344

Bucks County Area Agency on Aging
267-880-5700

Bucks County Coroner’s Office
215-348-3852

Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA)
1-800-675-6900

A Woman’s Place (AWP)
1-800-220-8116

Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection
215-348-6060

Bucks County Register of Wills
215-348-6265

www.crimesagainstolderadultsbucks.org
24 - HOUR HOTLINE: 1-800-490-8505