

Home Performance Belongs to the HVAC Industry

By Dominick Guarino, Chairman & CEO, National Comfort Institute

Home performance used to focus on roofs, insulation, windows, and doors: Today it also includes the mechanical systems. As an HVAC contractor, this evolved aspect of delivering economical comfort should be your priority, not some third party inspector's.

There's more hype and misleading information than ever out there with regards to what constitutes "home performance." Today, HVAC contractors are faced with several important issues, including what role they should play with regard to home performance.

Outside of some basic knowledge of building science, most HVAC contractors have the inherent skills and tools to make homes work properly, and in harmony with the HVAC system. Better contractors are learning to self-verify and document their work to prove to customers they did what they said they'd do.

Is there any real value in third parties verifying your work, especially when they typically know much less about HVAC system performance than the contractors they're trying to police? Over the next few years there'll be a major reshaping of home and HVAC performance into one industry. The question is, how will it affect HVAC contractors who have built good, customer service-driven businesses?

What new levels of regulation and government meddling might we see? What will incentivized "energy efficiency" programs look like? Will we become stifled with overregulation like many other industries? Will some people try to build new businesses by adding unneeded inspection steps? These are just a few questions that each of us has to ask as we move forward into these uncharted waters.

What we do know is the HVAC system has the single biggest impact on overall energy usage in homes and most small businesses. While adding insulation and tightening the envelope has some positive impacts, in the average North American home these measures are eclipsed by what a properly sized and installed HVAC system can do.

As an old friend of mine, Bob Brice, used to say, "You can't



save BTUs you don't have." Insulating and sealing the structure is fine, but it won't help one bit with getting the full capacity of the HVAC system into the building to begin with.

It's important to note that by "HVAC system" I don't mean the furnace, air handler, and condensing unit. These are only components of a whole system that includes the ductwork, control devices, dampers, registers and grills, and yes, the interactions between rooms of the home or building itself.

Getting all of these components properly sized, installed, balanced and working in harmony is the key. It's not just about sealing and insulating ductwork either. Although when done in conjunction with a properly sized and installed duct system, these measures can contribute significantly to overall performance and energy efficiency.

This is not to say that sealing envelopes and adding insulation can't be part of the "systems" solution. In fact the HVAC contractor is probably in the best position to diagnose the biggest faults and create a scope of work for a third-party insulator, or even do it himself.

The bottom line is as HVAC and home comfort experts, we're responsible for the overall comfort, safety, healthiness, and energy efficiency of a home. Especially in existing homes, your work can —by far— have the largest

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impact compared with any other trade. You are also in the best position to acquire the knowledge to connect all the dots of home and HVAC system performance. HVAC contractors who embrace this will win big over the next decade, as opportunities to provide these comprehensive services will abound.

Another important point: a well-trained, knowledgeable contractor can help the home or building owner prioritize the work that will give them the best bang for their buck and achieve the best results for the lowest possible investment.

The contrary is evidenced by many “whole house” programs led by people from outside our industry that cost homeowners tens of thousands of dollars in insulation, window, and door replacement, as well as equipment replacement — without ever addressing the real energy and comfort robbers. The result is often work that passes muster in “fill in the blank” energy or quality programs, but scores 60-70% or less when true performance is measured.

One final piece of advice: Don't let others sell your industry short by allowing people with less knowledge, but perhaps more political clout, to run roughshod over our industry.

Demand from your industry associations and advocacy groups that they act in your best interests and those of your

customers, rather than create programs that add layers of bureaucracy and steps that waste your customers' hard earned money on unnecessary steps, intrusive policing, and overstepping verification processes.

As Chairman and CEO, Dominick Guarino has grown the company from the ground up along side President Rob Falke, into the HVAC industry's largest independent training and certification organization. He co-founded NCI in 1994 with Rob (originally National Balancing Institute). NCI has also grown into a premier membership organization focused on every aspect of helping HVAC contractors. Dominick oversees all aspects of operations, new product introductions, and sales and marketing for the company. He also manages NCI's business management, sales and soft skills training team. He presides over NCI conferences and participates in HVAC industry conferences and meetings.



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