



From The Home Inspector

HEAT PUMP OR ELECTRIC FURNACE?????????

The heat pump started gaining in popularity in our area in the 1970's. Prior to, and during that time, houses with electric forced air heat were heated with an electric furnace. The electric furnace is a very inefficient and costly way to heat and thus is much less desirable than a heat pump. The homes most likely to have electric furnaces are those built in the 70's or before.

If you list a home and represent it with a heat pump when in fact it has an electric furnace, you will probably be responsible for the purchase and installation of a new heat pump. In order to keep this possibility to a minimum, I talked with a heating and air-conditioning expert and asked what a real estate agent could look for to determine if the heating was actually a heat pump.

If a seller represents to you that the home has a heat pump please do the following:

CHECK THE THERMOSTAT: Look for a switch or setting for "Emergency Heat" or "Supplemental Heat". A heat pump works in the heating cycle like an air conditioner in reverse by pulling heat from the outside air. When the outside temperature is very low it would be very hard or impossible for the heat pump to adequately heat the house on its own. Heat pumps in our area have what is called "emergency", "supplemental" or "back-up" heat which in most cases is electric strip heat but could also be natural gas, propane or oil heat. If the thermostat does not have the "Emergency Heat" or "Supplemental Heat" switch or setting it is probably not a heat pump but the fact that the switch or setting is on the thermostat does

not prove that it is a heat pump.

CHECK THE OUTSIDE UNIT: The ultimate test is to set the thermostat in the heating mode and turn the thermostat to a setting that would make the heat come on. When hot air is coming out of the duct work, go outside and if the outside unit is running, you have a heat pump. If it is not running you do not.

If you do the above listed checks and you believe the house does not have a heat pump and the seller continues to insist they do, inform them you will not list the heat as a heat pump unless you have a written verification from a local, licensed heating and air-conditioning contractor that the system is in fact a heat pump.

Ask for assistance if you are unclear as to how to perform the checks listed above.

Submitted as un-authored