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New Heat and Air Conditioner Work Law!

CSLB bulletin relating to energy code requirements

Contractors State License Board Alerts Contractors to New Heat and Air Conditioner Work Law.

Consumers will also feel the effect of new rules.

Sacramento - The Contractors State License Board (CSLB) has teamed up with the California Energy Commission (CEC) to get the word out about new energy code requirements that go into effect on October 1, 2005 that contractors must meet. Under the new law (Building Energy Efficiency Standards, Title 24, Part 6), contractors must test a home's ducts for leaks when a new central air conditioner or furnace is installed or replaced. If the ducts leak 15% or more, they must be repaired.

Many homes with central air conditioning and heating have ducts that were never properly sealed. The average home's ducts leak around 30 percent of the conditioned air outside of the home. These leaks are taking money straight out of homeowner's pocketbook every month in wasted energy. The added cost to seal these ducts properly will be repaid through the energy savings. Properly sealed ducts also provide greater comfort, reduce indoor pollution, and help to avoid a repeat of the inconvenience and health and safety risks that were suffered in the power blackouts in 2000.

Do these requirements apply throughout the state?

No, they only apply in specific climate zones defined by the Commission (climate zones 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16). These are inland climate zones where there is substantial air conditioning or heating. The requirements don't apply to mild climate regions near the coast.

Are there other situations where these requirements do not apply?

Yes. Duct sealing is not required when systems have less than 40 feet of ductwork in unconditioned spaces like attics, garages, crawlspaces, basements or outside the building or when ducts are constructed, insulated or sealed with asbestos. There also are specific alternatives that allow high efficiency equipment and added duct insulation to be installed instead of fixing duct leaks.

How is duct leakage measured to determine if the ducts are sealed?

The installing contractor pressure tests every system to meet one of the four criteria established in the Standards. The measurement must be completed using special pressurization equipment (commonly called a "duct blaster") following procedures established by the Commission.

Who does the third-party verification?

A homeowner can choose to either have an approved third-party field verifier check to make sure the duct testing and sealing was done properly or have their house included in a random sample where one in seven duct systems are checked. The third-party verification must be done by a certified Home Energy Rating System (HERS) rater. The installing contractor needs to contact the HERS rater to arrange for the verification. The HERS rater is required by law to be independent from the installing contractor to avoid having a conflict-of-interest.

Is duct sealing required when space conditioning equipment is replaced in commercial buildings also?

Yes, in some cases. When single zone space conditioning equipment is replaced and when at least 25% of the ducts are installed outside of the building or in unconditioned space (above an insulated drop or sheetrock ceiling), duct sealing requirements must be met.

How can I get more information on the requirements?

Contact the California Energy Commission hotline at (800) 772-3300. Training will be offered by utilities and other organizations around the state. The California Energy Commission will provide information about training in its quarterly newsletter, the Blueprint; you can tell the hotline that you want to be added to the Blueprint email list. The California Energy Commission has also prepared a letter for you to give to homeowners explaining the new law. The letter is available at: www.energy.ca.gov/title24/changeout.

What Contractors State License Law Requirements apply to compliance with the Energy Code?

A contractor must be licensed to do installation work valued at \$500 or more. All contractors are required to follow all California building code requirements, including the California Energy Code. Contractors are required to get building permits for replacement of space conditioning equipment valued at \$500 or more.

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