

ENVIRONMENTAL HOME

Hire a reputable duct cleaning service

By Dan Howard

FOR TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

Most of us have heard of "duct cleaning services." The goal of this service is to stop the spread of the dirt and debris from the ductwork into the air we breathe.

By debris, we include mold spores, dust mites, pollen, pet allergens, house dust and a host of other particles. These "airborne chunks" can affect respiratory health, induce allergies and are disgusting to know that we are breathing.

Cleaning ductwork is an essential part of a healthy indoor air environment that is recommended after most mold remediation jobs and for respiratory health patients.

There are many choices in the duct cleaning service industry and a wide range of price points and quality of workmanship. Most people do like to save money but also want the job to be done correctly.

There are companies that will bid about \$200 or even less. They will do the job in an hour or two but are not doing the work properly. As with many services, it takes time, proper training and equipment to do the job correctly.

The typical cost of a quality duct cleaning job in a 3-bedroom average size home



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After vacuuming the ductwork near registers, workers will insert an agitating tool to loosen and push dirt.

is usually in the \$500 to \$800 range, depending upon the amount of ductwork and the way it is laid out. This is an important job that should be done correctly. A budget coupon job is not worth the money no matter how low the price.

So how is a consumer to know if they are getting a good job?

Great question! Let's talk about how the job should be properly performed. My previous understanding of the process was through literature and technical videos. To get a better understanding of the process, I asked Mold Medics

of Greater Pittsburgh to allow me to go on a job with them and watch the actual work being done.

The air duct registers should be removed and cleaned. The ductwork sections closest to the registers are then swept out with a HEPA vacuum. There are usually large chunks of fallen dirt and debris from original construction and the regular sweeping of floors in the ductwork near registers.

It is best to vacuum out the dirt near the registers of the ductwork rather than pushing it through the rest of the ductwork.

After sweeping out the duct-

work close to the registers, the openings in the registers are covered with a plastic film to create a seal. This is done to maximize the suction on the individual section of the ductwork line as it is cleaned.

The proper equipment and workmanship is critical to having the duct cleaning job done right.

There should be a massive vacuum machine to suction dirt. By massive, I mean about 6 feet tall and a couple of feet in diameter. It can set in a service truck or be wheeled into the home. Most technicians will bring the machine into the home for optimal suction. The 6-inch or larger suction hose is attached first to the return air system after cutting a hole in the ductwork. There is also a separate air compressor to push the dirt down the ductwork into the suction machine.

One by one, each duct has the temporary plastic cover removed from the opening where the register was re-

moved. The surfaces of the ductwork are agitated with a spinning "whip" made of plastic ribbons mounted on a flexible pipe.

That whip hose also supplies the compressed air to loosen the dirt. This compressed air is pushing the dirt down the length of the duct while the vacuum equipment is sucking in that dirt and debris from where the suction pipe is attached near the furnace.

After all the individual ductwork runs to the rooms have been cleaned, it is time to clean the main horizontal runs. These main ducts are usually on the ceiling of the basement or along the joists where the furnace is located.

Cleaning these longer horizontal runs requires cutting one-inch round access holes every few feet. The combination whip and compressed air hose is inserted into the end of the ductwork most distant from the furnace. Each duct is cleaned, and the dirt pushed toward the furnace area section by section. The access holes in the ductwork are then filled with plastic caps after that process of pushing the dirt and debris toward the furnace is complete.

High quality suction and compressor equipment are needed to move the dirt from the ductwork to the massive collection bag in the suction machine. Low quality equipment can loosen the debris in the ductwork and unfortunately result in increased levels of the dirt and debris in the air from the ductwork.

The cleaning process leaves us with dirt in the furnace's main return air duct, plenum, furnace blower and air condi-

tioner A-coil.

No job is done until the holes cut in the ductwork are filled, the registers are back in place and the tools and equipment are out of the home.

Poor-quality duct cleaning jobs are more common than you might think. I often check the condition of the blower, return air and other components of the furnace during an environmental assessment. When I check these in a building where a duct cleaning job has already been completed, more than 50 percent of those cleaning jobs still have heavy levels of dirt and debris in these areas.

Some of the A-coils have even been covered in mold growth after a "duct cleaning." I have also removed registers and reached down the ductwork and been able to pick up pieces of dirt after a cleaning. This is disgusting for me and disheartening for the people who paid to have their ducts cleaned.

The bottom line is the same as in any construction service. Hire quality companies that have well-trained technicians, charge a fair price and properly perform all the steps in the project. A job poorly done is not a bargain, especially when a bad bargain job affects the health of people we care about.

For links and additional information about duct cleaning, go to EnviroSpect.com/DuctCleaning.

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