VANCOUVER HVAC PRO

Boilers & Radiant Heating

Hot-water boilers, combi boilers, in-floor radiant heat, radiators and hydronic systems in older Vancouver houses

4 Expert Answers from HVAC IQ

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Q1

How often should a gas boiler be serviced in British Columbia?

Annual servicing is what Technical Safety BC recommends for all home heating appliances in BC, and a gas boiler is no exception. That means once every 12 months, ideally in late summer or early September before the heating season starts and before contractors get swamped with emergency calls.

What a boiler service visit covers

A thorough annual tune-up typically includes a combustion analysis to check burner efficiency and CO production, inspection of the heat exchanger and flue venting, testing of the pressure relief valve and expansion tank, checking circulator pump operation and system pressure, cleaning the burner assembly, and a carbon monoxide safety check. The technician should also look at the condensate drain on a condensing boiler, which can clog in the wet Lower Mainland winters and cause nuisance shutdowns. Expect to pay $150 to $300 for a standard annual tune-up in Metro Vancouver.

A few local realities make annual service more than just a nice-to-have here. The damp marine climate means flue components and venting see more moisture stress than in drier parts of Canada. Older Vancouver, New Westminster and North Shore homes often have boilers that share a chimney with a gas water heater, and that shared venting arrangement needs to be checked every year, especially if either appliance has been replaced or modified. **The City of Vancouver Fire By-law also requires a working carbon monoxide alarm inside each bedroom, or within five metres of each bedroom door, in any home with a fuel-burning appliance**, so a service visit is a good time to test those alarms and replace batteries.

Beyond the annual visit, pay attention between services. A boiler that short-cycles, loses pressure repeatedly, makes banging or kettling sounds, or shows any pilot or ignition fault should be looked at promptly rather than waiting for the next scheduled visit. Ignoring a pressure or venting problem through a wet Vancouver winter tends to turn a $300 repair into a much larger one.

The work must be done by a gas fitter employed by a contractor licensed with Technical Safety BC. Before booking, ask the company to confirm their Technical Safety BC gas contractor licence number, and check that they carry WorkSafeBC coverage. Permits are not typically required for routine servicing, but any repair that involves replacing a gas component or modifying venting may trigger a permit requirement depending on the municipality.

The single factor that most changes the cost and outcome of boiler service is the age and condition of the venting: a boiler on a shared masonry chimney in an older home may need a liner or venting upgrade that adds significantly to the bill. If that comes up in the inspection, it is worth getting two or three quotes on the venting work before committing. Vancouver HVAC Pro can pass the venting job to a couple of local gas contractors so you have prices

to compare.

Q2

Do radiators in an older house near Commercial Drive need bleeding every fall?

Radiators in a hot-water boiler system do benefit from bleeding once a year, but "every fall without fail" is a slight overstatement. If air has collected in the system over the summer, you will hear gurgling or notice that a radiator stays cold at the top while the bottom is warm. That is the signal to bleed.

What bleeding actually does

A hot-water (hydronic) system circulates water through the boiler and radiators in a closed loop. Air gets in gradually, especially after any work on the system or if the pressure drops and the auto-fill valve adds fresh water. Bleeding releases that trapped air through the small bleed valve on each radiator, letting hot water fill the space and restore full heat output. Older houses near Commercial Drive often have cast-iron radiators and a boiler that is 20 or more years old, which means the system may have accumulated sediment and small leaks that let air in more readily than a newer installation.

The job itself is homeowner-friendly: turn the boiler off and let it cool slightly, hold a small container under the bleed valve, open the valve with a radiator key or flat screwdriver until water (not air) runs out steadily, then close it. Check the system pressure gauge afterward and confirm it reads in the normal range, typically around 12 to 15 psi when cold. If pressure drops repeatedly, that points to a leak or a failing expansion tank, which a gas contractor should inspect.

A few things that matter in this neighbourhood's housing stock: many of these homes have a shared chimney serving the boiler and the gas water heater. If you are having a contractor in for the annual boiler tune-up (Technical Safety BC recommends yearly servicing of gas appliances), ask them to check the flue for blockages and confirm the water heater venting is still clear. A high-efficiency condensing boiler vented through PVC does not share that concern, but the older atmospheric boilers common in this area do.

If the boiler itself needs replacing, a City of Vancouver gas permit is required, issued by the City rather than Technical Safety BC. An electrical permit from the City would cover any new controls or zone wiring. A like-for-like boiler swap is allowed without a zero-emission requirement; there is no rule in Vancouver mandating that a replacement boiler be anything other than what works for the house.

Costs to keep in mind: a diagnostic service call runs roughly $120 to $250, and an annual boiler tune-up is typically $150 to $300. If bleeding does not solve cold radiators and the system needs a full flush or a circulator pump

replacement, expect $400 to $900 for common repairs.

Fall is the right time to bleed and service a boiler, before the first cold snap. Boiler contractors in Metro Vancouver get busy fast once October nights drop, so booking a tune-up in September tends to mean shorter waits and more scheduling flexibility. Book the tune-up for September if you can; Vancouver HVAC Pro will forward your request to a boiler technician near Commercial Drive.

Q3

What price range should I expect for a combi boiler in Burnaby?

A combi boiler installation in Burnaby typically runs **$8,000 to $14,000** installed, and that range can stretch toward $16,000 or more if the job involves replacing old radiators, adding a zone valve, or reworking the distribution piping to suit the new unit's lower output temperature.

What moves the price

Combi boilers do two jobs at once: space heating and domestic hot water on demand, with no separate storage tank. The unit cost alone varies significantly by brand, BTU capacity and whether it is a wall-hung condensing model (which most new installs are). Older Burnaby homes from the 1960s through 1980s often have oversized cast-iron radiators or baseboard convectors that were sized for a higher-temperature boiler, which affects how the new unit is set up. A condensing combi runs most efficiently at lower water temperatures (around 55°C to 65°C), so a contractor may need to assess whether your existing emitters can keep up on a cold snap.

The gas and electrical permit paths in Burnaby are both handled by the City of Burnaby directly, not Technical Safety BC, so the contractor pulls both permits through the city. Those fees are normally included in a proper quote; ask explicitly if they are not. Burnaby also requires a building permit application for some heat pump installations, but for a straight combi boiler replacement that is generally not triggered.

On venting: most condensing combis exhaust through a PVC flue that exits through an exterior wall, which is simpler than relining a chimney. If your existing chimney also serves a gas water heater, removing the old boiler changes the draft dynamics, and the contractor must assess whether the water heater's venting is still safe. A combi boiler eliminates the separate water heater entirely, which is one reason the payback math often works out.

What a fair quote should include: a heat loss calculation for the house (not just matching the old boiler's rating), the specific model and BTU output, all gas and electrical permit fees, new venting through the wall, removal and disposal of the old boiler and water heater if applicable, a condensate drain connection, and a labour warranty of at least one year alongside the manufacturer's parts warranty.

Before signing, confirm the contractor holds a gas contractor licence with Technical Safety BC (even though Burnaby issues its own permits, the licence requirement is provincial), and ask for proof of WorkSafeBC coverage.

The single factor that most often pushes a Burnaby combi job past the $14,000 mark is discovering the existing radiators or baseboards are undersized for lower-temperature operation and need upgrading. Getting two or three quotes that each include a proper heat loss assessment is the best way to catch that before work starts. Vancouver HVAC Pro can connect you with local contractors for free if you want to compare.

Q4

Is a condensing boiler worth the cost for a North Shore home?

For most North Shore homes with an existing hot-water radiator or in-floor system, a condensing boiler is worth the premium, but the answer turns almost entirely on what your current venting situation looks like and whether your distribution system can run at low enough water temperatures to let the boiler actually condense.

What makes condensing worthwhile here

A condensing boiler extracts heat from the flue gases that a standard boiler wastes, pushing efficiency from roughly 80% to 90-97% AFUE. In a North Shore climate, where heating seasons run longer and colder than Richmond or Delta, that gap translates to real gas savings year after year. Replacement costs in Metro Vancouver run $8,000-$18,000 for a straight boiler swap; a combi boiler (heating and domestic hot water in one unit) sits in the $8,000-$14,000 range. The condensing premium over a non-condensing unit is typically $1,500-$3,000 in equipment cost, often recovered within five to eight years on a North Shore house.

The catch is venting. A condensing boiler cannot use an existing masonry chimney or B-vent; it needs a dedicated PVC or CPVC exhaust and a separate combustion air intake. If your chimney currently serves both the boiler and a gas water heater, removing the boiler from it means the water heater may need its own liner or replacement as well.

Distribution temperature matters too. Condensing only happens when the return water temperature stays below about 55°C. Old cast-iron radiators sized for high-temperature systems may need the boiler to run hotter, which reduces or eliminates the efficiency gain. A contractor who does a proper heat loss calculation and checks your radiator sizing can tell you whether low-temperature operation is realistic, or whether adding a mixing valve or upgrading some radiators makes sense.

On the permit side: the City of North Vancouver and the District of North Vancouver both issue their own gas permits for residential work; Technical Safety BC handles gas permits in West Vancouver. Your contractor pulls the gas permit and should include it in the quote. If the job involves a new electrical circuit for controls or a pump, the City of North Vancouver, the District of North Vancouver and West Vancouver each issue their own electrical permits as well.

For rebates, a like-for-like gas boiler replacement does not qualify for BC Hydro's heat pump rebate, and there is currently no general CleanBC fuel-switching rebate for gas-heated Metro Vancouver homes that are not income-qualified. FortisBC's heat pump rebates are only for its own electricity customers, which does not include Metro Vancouver. If your household is income-qualified, the CleanBC Energy Savings Program is worth checking before you decide on a boiler versus a heat pump.

A fair quote should include a heat loss calculation, the specific boiler model and output in kW, all venting materials and labour, any water heater venting changes, the permit fee, removal of the old unit, and a warranty on both parts and labour. Ask each contractor for their Technical Safety BC gas contractor licence number and confirm WorkSafeBC coverage before signing.

The single factor that most changes both the price and the outcome on the North Shore is the existing venting: a simple flue swap adds little, but a chimney that needs a liner or a water heater that needs its own venting solution adds real cost, so ask for it to be priced as its own line. If you want to put two or three local quotes side by side, Vancouver HVAC Pro can connect you with contractors who work in your area.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Vancouver HVAC Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local permit authority (your municipality or Technical Safety BC) before starting any heating, cooling or gas project. Information is current as of November 8, 2026 and may change. Visit **vancouverhvacpro.com** for the latest answers.