VANCOUVER HVAC PRO

Maintenance & Tune-ups

Annual furnace, heat pump and boiler servicing, filters, maintenance plans and what a proper tune-up includes

4 Expert Answers from HVAC IQ

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Q1

Our Delta basement condensate drain keeps clogging, how is that prevented?

Condensate drain clogs are one of the most common service calls in Metro Vancouver, and Delta's damp climate makes them worse: a high-efficiency furnace or air handler can produce several litres of water a day, and that slow-moving acidic condensate is a perfect environment for algae, mould and mineral scale to build up inside the drain line.

Why It Keeps Blocking

The usual culprits are biofilm (a slimy layer of algae and bacteria), calcium and mineral deposits from the water itself, and debris that enters through an improperly trapped or open drain. A secondary cause is a drain line that was installed with too little slope, so water pools instead of flowing freely to the floor drain or utility sink.

Prevention starts with the trap and the slope. The condensate trap must be deep enough to hold a water seal without letting the furnace pull air back through the drain, and the line from the trap to the discharge point should slope consistently downward, ideally at least 1 cm of drop for every 30 cm of run. If the original installation cut corners here, a contractor can rerun the line properly.

For ongoing maintenance, a few steps make a real difference. Every one to three months, pour a small amount of diluted white vinegar (roughly a quarter cup) into the drain access point or the trap cleanout; this inhibits biofilm without damaging PVC fittings. At the same time, check that the drain line is not kinked or sagging. Once a year, during a professional tune-up, ask the technician to flush the full condensate system, check the trap depth and inspect the drain pan under the coil for standing water or scale buildup. Technical Safety BC recommends annual servicing of home heating appliances, and the condensate system is a natural part of that visit.

A few other things worth checking in a Delta home: if the furnace is in a cold basement corner, the condensate line can slow down or even partially freeze in a hard cold snap, so insulating the exposed section of line helps. If the drain discharges into a floor drain that itself drains slowly, back-pressure can cause apparent clogs that are actually a downstream problem. And if the drain pan under a coil is cracked or corroded, it should be replaced before it causes water damage to the furnace cabinet or the floor.

For a heat pump or air conditioner running in summer, the volume of condensate is even higher, so the same maintenance schedule applies but with more urgency during a heat wave.

A homeowner can safely flush the line with vinegar and clear obvious debris from the access point. Anything involving the furnace cabinet, the coil or the trap itself is better left to a licensed technician, since disturbing the drain pan or coil connections incorrectly can introduce air leaks or damage the heat exchanger.

Keeping the condensate system clean is straightforward once the line is properly sloped and trapped; if yours keeps blocking despite regular flushing, the underlying installation is likely the issue, and a local HVAC technician can sort it out quickly. If you'd like, we can send your details to Delta-area HVAC contractors so you can get a couple of quotes and find someone to take a look.

Q2

What should a technician check during a heat pump service visit in BC?

A thorough annual heat pump service visit in Metro Vancouver typically costs $150 to $300 and covers far more than a quick filter swap. Given the region's wet winters, frequent defrost cycles and wildfire smoke seasons, skipping a year can mean losing heat on the first cold night of October or facing a costly refrigerant call in July.

What a Technician Should Cover

Outdoor unit and refrigerant circuit. The technician checks refrigerant pressure and looks for leaks. Only a person approved under BC's Ozone Depleting Substances and Other Halocarbons Regulation may handle refrigerant, so confirm that certification before booking. They clean the outdoor coil, clear debris from the base pan and drainage path, and inspect the fan blade and motor. In Metro Vancouver's damp climate, the condensate drain and the unit's mounting pad deserve a close look every visit.

Electrical and controls. The tech checks capacitors, contactors and wiring connections, measures amperage draw on the compressor and fan motors, and tests the defrost board and defrost cycle. A heat pump here defrosts frequently from November through March, so a faulty defrost control is one of the more common causes of iced-up outdoor units.

Indoor air handler. The filter gets inspected or replaced (a MERV 11 to 13 filter is worth considering if wildfire smoke is a concern). The tech cleans the indoor coil, checks the blower wheel and motor, and inspects the condensate drain pan and line for blockages, which are common in humid Lower Mainland winters.

Thermostat and operating modes. Both heating and cooling modes should be tested, along with the emergency heat setting if the system has one. The technician verifies the thermostat is calling correctly and that the reversing valve switches cleanly between modes.

Airflow and duct condition. For a ducted system, the tech checks static pressure and looks for obvious duct leaks at accessible joints. Poor airflow is one of the most common reasons a heat pump underperforms in a Metro Vancouver house.

Safety and documentation. The technician should note the unit's model, serial number, refrigerant type and any readings that are drifting toward the edge of spec. A written service report lets you track trends year over year and supports any warranty claim.

What to ask before booking. Confirm the technician holds refrigerant certification under BC's regulations. Ask whether the service fee covers the diagnostic report and any minor adjustments, or only the inspection itself. If the system is still under the manufacturer's warranty, check whether the warranty requires annual service by a qualified technician to stay valid.

Technical Safety BC recommends annual servicing of all home heating appliances. That is a recommendation rather than a legal requirement, but in a climate where a heat pump runs almost every month of the year, it is easy to justify.

A well-serviced heat pump runs quieter, holds efficiency longer and gives you early warning before a small refrigerant leak or a failing capacitor turns into a $1,000 repair. Annual service is the cheapest insurance you have on a $10,000 to $20,000 system.

Good maintenance is worth doing right, and a local technician who knows Metro Vancouver's wet winters will know exactly what to look for. If you'd like, Vancouver HVAC Pro can connect you with a nearby HVAC contractor for a service visit.

Q3

How long does a gas furnace typically last in BC?

A gas furnace in Metro Vancouver typically lasts 15 to 25 years, with most units hitting the 18 to 20 year mark before repairs start outpacing the value of keeping them running. The mild, damp climate here is a mixed blessing: winters are rarely brutal enough to run a furnace hard for months on end, but the constant cycling on and off in our shoulder seasons and the humidity can wear heat exchangers and inducer motors faster than in drier climates.

What actually determines how long yours lasts

Annual servicing is the single biggest factor. A furnace that gets a tune-up every fall, with a fresh filter and a combustion check, will reliably outlast one that runs ignored until something breaks. Technical Safety BC recommends annual servicing of all home heating appliances, and in Metro Vancouver's wet winters a clogged condensate drain or a dirty flame sensor is often what turns a routine service call into an emergency on the first cold night of October.

Filter changes matter more than most people expect. A high-efficiency furnace with a clogged filter strains the blower motor and heat exchanger, two of the most expensive components to replace. Check the filter every one to three months during heating season, depending on the filter type and whether you have pets.

The other variable is the original installation. A furnace sized from a proper heat loss calculation, vented correctly and matched to the home's ductwork will run longer and more efficiently than one that was oversized and slapped in quickly. Older Vancouver and Burnaby houses with shared chimneys are a particular concern: a high-efficiency condensing furnace cannot vent up a masonry chimney, so the venting has to be reworked at installation, and if it was not done right the unit degrades faster.

Beyond about 15 years, watch the repair bills closely. A heat exchanger crack is a safety issue, not just a cost issue, because it can allow combustion gases including carbon monoxide to enter the living space. If a technician flags a cracked heat exchanger, that furnace needs to come out. City of Vancouver homes are required to have CO alarms within 5 metres of each bedroom door, and that requirement exists for exactly this reason.

The 15-to-25-year window is also when the economics of replacement start to shift. A new high-efficiency condensing furnace (95 AFUE or better) costs roughly $5,500 to $11,000 installed in Metro Vancouver, including the permit. If your furnace is past 18 years and you are looking at a repair over $1,000, most contractors will tell you honestly that replacement is the smarter spend, especially since a new unit will be more efficient and come with a parts and labour warranty.

One more local wrinkle: if you are in the City of Vancouver and considering adding cooling at the same time, any new permanently installed air conditioning in a detached house or duplex must be a heat pump, not a cooling-only unit. That changes the replacement conversation considerably for some homeowners.

A furnace that has served you well for two decades has done its job; the question is just whether to repair or replace, and a good contractor will give you an honest answer on that. When the time comes, line up a few local quotes before the old furnace forces the decision; Vancouver HVAC Pro handles the introductions.

Q4

What happens during a boiler service in an older Kerrisdale home?

A boiler service in an older Kerrisdale home typically takes two to three hours and costs between $150 and $300 for a standard annual tune-up, depending on the age of the system and whether any parts need attention.

What a Technician Actually Does

Most Kerrisdale houses with boilers were built between the 1920s and 1960s, and many still run the original cast-iron radiators and copper or steel distribution piping. The technician starts at the boiler itself: inspecting the heat exchanger for cracks or corrosion, checking the burner flame colour and combustion, cleaning the burner assembly and igniter, and testing the gas valve and controls. The flue and venting get checked for blockages, corrosion and proper draft, which matters especially in older homes where the boiler shares a masonry chimney with a gas water heater. A shared chimney that is undersized for a modern condensing boiler is one of the more common surprises in this neighbourhood.

From there the technician moves to the distribution system: checking operating pressure (typically 12 to 18 psi cold), testing the pressure relief valve, inspecting the expansion tank, and bleeding air from radiators that are slow to heat. Older Kerrisdale homes often have zone valves or a single-zone gravity system; the technician will check whichever controls are present and confirm the circulator pump is running quietly and without leaks. Pump bearings are a common wear item on systems that are 20 or more years old.

Combustion gases are tested with an analyser to confirm carbon monoxide levels are within safe limits. **The City of Vancouver Fire By-law requires a CO alarm inside each bedroom or within five metres of each bedroom door in any home with a fuel-burning appliance, so if yours are missing or past their expiry date, replace them before the technician leaves.** Technical Safety BC recommends annual servicing of all home heating appliances, and a boiler that has not been touched in several years may need a more thorough clean and adjustment than a routine tune-up covers.

The technician should also note the boiler's age and efficiency rating. A cast-iron atmospheric boiler from the 1980s or earlier is likely running at 60 to 70 percent efficiency; a modern condensing boiler can reach 90 to 95 percent. If the unit is approaching the end of its serviceable life, a replacement quote is worth having alongside the service report. Boiler replacement in Metro Vancouver typically runs $8,000 to $18,000, more if distribution work or new zones are involved.

Because this is gas work in the City of Vancouver, the gas permit is issued by the City itself, not Technical Safety BC. Any repair that goes beyond routine maintenance, such as replacing a gas valve, heat exchanger or burner assembly, requires a licensed gas fitter employed by a gas contractor licensed with Technical Safety BC, and the

City of Vancouver will issue the permit for that work.

A good question to ask any contractor before booking: "Will you test combustion gases and check the flue draft, or is this a visual inspection only?" The answer tells you quickly whether you are getting a real service or a checkbox visit.

Vancouver HVAC Pro can send your details to local contractors who service older boiler systems in Kerrisdale and across the City of Vancouver, at no cost to you.

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.