5 Ductless Mini Split Myths

Misconceptions and outdated information about ductless systems can keep homeowners from making the best decisions.

By Suzi Asmus, NW Ductless Heat Pump Project

Mini splits—or ductless heat pumps—have become increasingly popular in Pacific Northwest homes. And since word-of-mouth is the most common way for homeowners to learn about going ductless it's no surprise that some incorrect assumptions about ductless systems persist.

Ductless heat pumps offer comfortable and efficient heating and cooling that works in almost any home with electric resistance heating. But misconceptions and outdated information about ductless systems can keep homeowners from making the best decisions about heating and cooling, which can mean that installers and contractors miss out on providing customers with the best solutions for their needs.

Here are five common reasons your customers might give for being wary of going ductless, and how you can show them that ductless heat pumps might work a lot better than they think.

Myth 1: They don't work when it's really cold

Ductless heat pumps have come a long way since the technology's early days.

While the mass-market heat pumps of even just 10 years ago struggled at the coldest temperatures, demand for this technology has been growing in colder climates like Canada and Scandinavia and the technology has matured to serve these climates.

Today, every major manufacturer (and some of the smaller ones, too) offers "extended capacity," or cold-climate, duct-

less heat pumps. In fact, most cold-climate ductless systems are able to provide at least 85 percent of their heating "oomph" at temperatures as cold as 5°F, making them the go-to for many contractors who work in colder areas. In fact, in some parts of the Pacific Northwest, contractors exclusively stock and sell cold-climate ductless heat pumps.

Myth 2: Their looks are lacking

Ever since ductless heat pumps were first introduced in the United States, homeowners have expressed misgivings about getting used to living with "that box on the wall."

But ductless systems now come in a variety of shapes, sizes and configurations, so homeowners can find a model that fits elegantly with their home's style.

Consumers today are also increasingly attracted to ductless systems' ability to cool the home. Even without central air, a home with a ductless heat pump is nearly as comfortable — and still very efficient.

And once homeowners have spent some time with their ductless system, around 95 percent report being satisfied or highly satisfied. As it turns out, considerations like low energy bills and comfort outweigh aesthetic concerns when it comes to heating and cooling solutions. With jurisdictions now adopting home energy scores as a part of the home sale process, ductless heat pumps may be of increasing value to future homebuyers.

Myth 3: They're too noisy

Up until the last decade, most large, central air source heat pumps and air conditioners were indeed loud. Both the outdoor unit (the compressor) and the air moving through the system fan produced noticeable noise– enough that some jurisdictions adopted noise ordinances aimed at air source heat pumps.

Let your customers know, ductless heat pumps benefit from smaller size and more advanced compressor technologies. This means much quieter outdoor units and indoor units that are nearly inaudible at low speed—and still quieter than a box fan on high speed or most window AC units.

Myth 4: They take too long to heat and cool the house

A ductless system should have no problem keeping up with your customer's home's heating and cooling needs. If homeowners keep in mind that a heat pump works differently than a furnace—and should therefore be operated differently—following these simple practices will keep their home at the right temperature.

In a home with an electric (or gas/propane) furnace, the system comes on full-blast and then turns off when the set temperature has been reached.

Ductless heat pumps heat and cool by running at a consistent mid-to-low speed, providing a more constant temperature and less of a hot or cold "swing" in between cycles, as a furnace does.

There is also generally no need to set the system back at all. Unlike with a furnace, where a homeowner might set the thermostat back while they are sleeping or away from the house, ductless heat pumps allow users to set it and forget it. With high-efficiency equipment, not needing to set your system back means great savings and very stable temperatures.

Homeowners can still set the thermostat back when they're away, but you should recommend dialing it back by no more than 3° F. With exceptions for extended absences, homes should not be set below 62° F in order to prevent mildew from growing. The same general rules apply for ductless heat pumps in cooling mode during summer months.

Myth 5: They don't work with smart homes

Homeowners are becoming increasingly tech-savvy, and are asking questions about smart and connected homes, and how they can integrate their appliances:

How will my ductless heat pump work with my smart devices? Will I be able to connect with Alexa or Google?

Many manufacturers are working to create ways for third party smart thermostats to work better with ductless heat pumps—one thing to look for is a product that advertises "Works with Nest" or "Works with Alexa."

Another development is that many ductless manufacturers use their own smart thermostats and connected controls and apps for their equipment. For example, Daikin has the ONE+ thermostat and Mitsubishi has the Kumo Cloud app. These proprietary apps and thermostats are easy to connect, and provide many of the same features as more well-known smart thermostats on the market. Beyond that, some are also now beginning to work directly with Nest or Alexa (and potentially others).

Now you have the facts

Ductless heat pumps have come a long way in terms of performance, aesthetics and features. As a result, many of

the myths about ductless heat pumps have become dated (if they were ever true in the first place). Ductless systems today deliver maximum comfort along with excellent efficiency and savings.

Resources for ductless heat pump installers and homeowners are available at GoingDuctless.com.

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