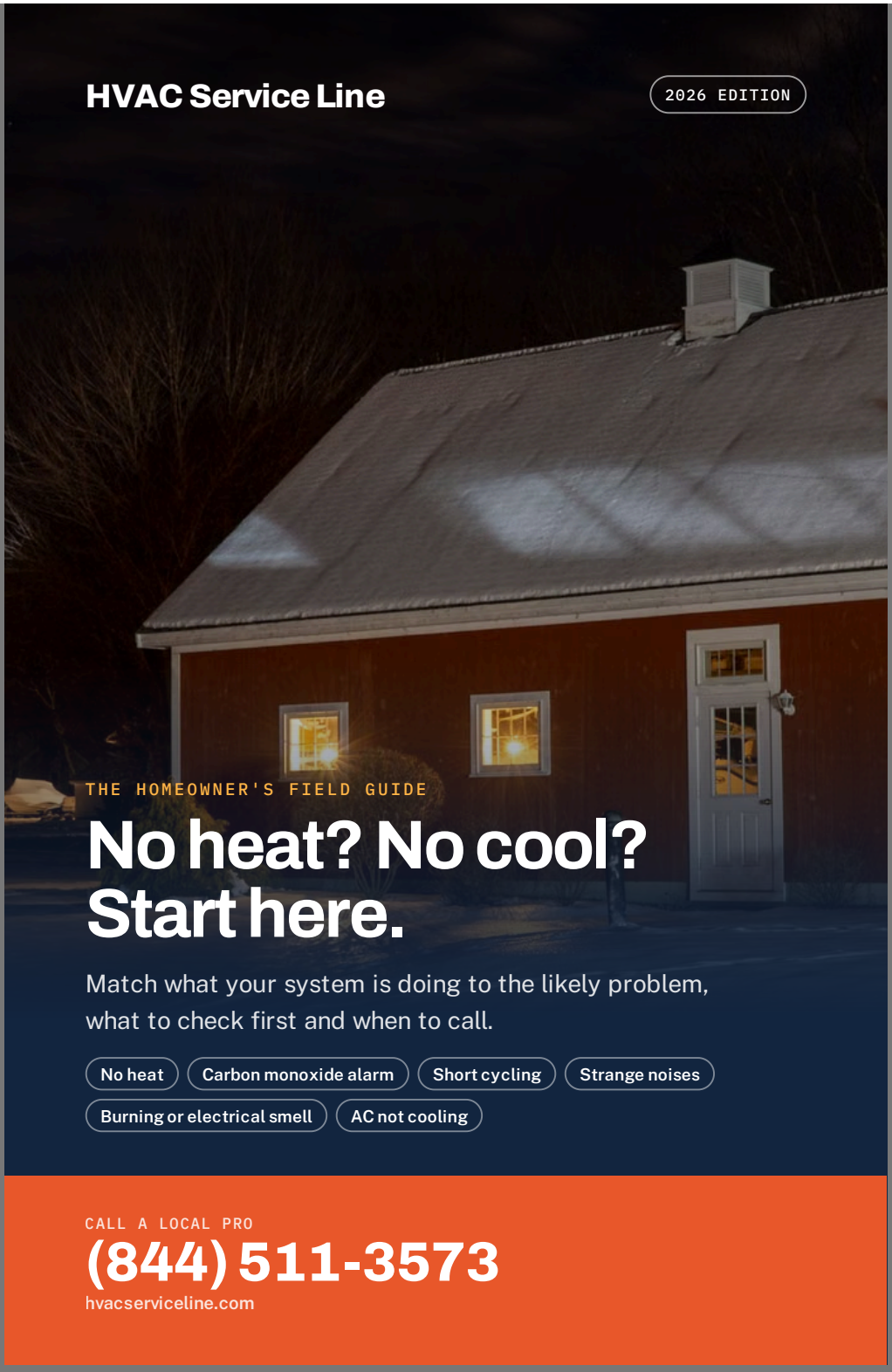


HVAC Service Line

2026 EDITION

THE HOMEOWNER'S FIELD GUIDE

No heat? No cool? Start here.

Match what your system is doing to the likely problem, what to check first and when to call.

- No heat
- Carbon monoxide alarm
- Short cycling
- Strange noises
- Burning or electrical smell
- AC not cooling

CALL A LOCAL PRO

(844) 511-3573

hvacserviceline.com

WELCOME

Keep this guide where you can find it fast

Problems at home rarely wait for a good moment. This guide helps you recognize what's going on, decide how fast to act and know what to do in the first few minutes.

1. **Start with the sign.** The "Identify it by the symptom" page matches what you see to the likely problem.
2. **Check the urgency.** Every problem carries a color: ● Call today, ● Call this week, ● Not urgent.
3. **Do the first steps.** Each problem lists what to do right now, while you call.

⚠ **Safety first.** General guidance only. For a gas smell, CO alarm or smoke, leave and call 911.

ONE CALL CONNECTS YOU WITH AN INDEPENDENT LOCAL COMPANY

(844) 511-3573

INSIDE

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AT A GLANCE

How urgent is it?

A quick way to sort the problem in front of you.

Call today

- No heat
- Carbon monoxide alarm
- Burning or electrical smell

Call this week

- Short cycling
- Strange noises
- AC not cooling
- Frozen coil or ice on the unit

Not urgent

- Thermostat problem

TALK TO A LOCAL PRO

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START HERE

Identify it by the symptom

Your system usually tells you what's wrong. Find your symptom, then jump to the likely cause.

WHAT YOU NOTICE	MOST LIKELY	PAGE
Furnace runs but blows cold air	**No heat**	6
Carbon monoxide alarm sounding	**CO alarm**	8
System clicks on and off every few minutes	**Short cycling**	10
Banging, squealing or grinding	**Strange noises**	12
Burning or electrical smell	**Burning smell**	14
AC runs but the house stays warm	**AC not cooling**	16
Ice on the outdoor unit or lines	**Frozen coil**	18
Thermostat screen is blank	**Thermostat problem**	20



01 CALL TODAY

PROBLEM 1 OF 8

No heat

CHECK FIRST	RISK IN A FREEZE
Thermostat, breaker, filter	**Frozen pipes**

How to recognize it

The furnace or heat pump won't start, runs but blows cold air, or the house keeps getting colder.

Prevent it next time

- Change the filter every one to three months.
- Book a heating tune-up each fall.
- Keep vents and returns clear of furniture.

Common causes

A clogged filter, tripped breaker, pilot or ignitor problem, or a failed blower or control board.

Signs to look for

- Cold air from vents
- Furnace won't start
- House temperature dropping
- Error light blinking on the furnace

Do this now

1. Check the thermostat is set to heat with fresh batteries.
2. Check the breaker and the furnace switch.
3. Replace a dirty filter.

What the pro will do

1. Checks power, thermostat, ignition and flame sensor.
2. Tests the blower and safety switches.
3. Explains the repair before starting it.

> Call today in freezing weather. Open cabinet doors under sinks to protect pipes.

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02 CALL TODAY

PROBLEM 2 OF 8

Carbon monoxide alarm

CO IS
Colorless and odorless

FIRST CALL
911 from outside

How to recognize it

Your CO alarm sounds, or people feel headache, dizziness or nausea that eases outside.

Prevent it next time

- Test CO alarms monthly and replace batteries yearly.
- Have the furnace and venting checked each fall.
- Never run generators or grills indoors.

What to do

Get everyone outside and call 911. Once cleared, have the furnace, water heater and venting checked before using them.

Signs to look for

- CO alarm sounding
- Headache or dizziness indoors
- Soot around the furnace
- Yellow, flickering burner flame

Do this now

1. Get everyone and pets outside now.
2. Call 911 from outside.
3. Don't go back in until cleared.

What the pro will do

1. Inspects the furnace, water heater and venting.
2. Checks for cracks, blockages and backdrafting.
3. Confirms it's safe before restarting.

> Leave and call 911 first. Then call for an inspection before using the system.

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03 CALL THIS WEEK

PROBLEM 3 OF 8

Short cycling

PATTERN	WEARS OUT
Runs a few minutes, stops	Parts and compressor

How to recognize it

The system starts and stops every few minutes without ever reaching the set temperature.

Prevent it next time

- Keep a clean filter in place.
- Keep the thermostat away from sun and drafts.
- Schedule seasonal maintenance.

Common causes

A dirty filter, overheating, a failing flame sensor, a refrigerant leak or a system sized wrong for the home.

Signs to look for

- Frequent on and off
- Uneven temperatures
- Higher energy bills
- System never seems to finish

Do this now

1. Replace the air filter.
2. Make sure vents and returns aren't blocked.
3. Note how long each cycle lasts.

What the pro will do

1. Checks airflow, flame sensor and limits.
2. Looks at refrigerant and sizing on AC.
3. Recommends a fix that stops the cycling.

> Call this week. Short cycling wears out the system fast.

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04 CALL THIS WEEK

PROBLEM 4 OF 8

Strange noises

BANGING
Ignition delay or ducts

SQUEALING
Belt or motor bearing

How to recognize it

Banging, booming, squealing, grinding, rattling or a loud hum that's new.

Prevent it next time

- Note new noises the day they start.
- Keep the area around the unit clear.
- Schedule seasonal maintenance.

Why it matters

New noises usually mean a part is wearing or loose. Catching it early can prevent a breakdown.

Signs to look for

- Loud bang when the burner lights
- High-pitched squeal
- Grinding or scraping
- Rattling panels

Do this now

1. Note when the noise happens: startup, running or shutdown.
2. Turn the system off if you hear grinding.
3. Record a short video.

What the pro will do

1. Pinpoints the part making the noise.
2. Tightens, lubricates or replaces it.
3. Checks related parts for wear.

> Call this week; turn it off now if you hear grinding.

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(844) 511-3573



05 CALL TODAY

PROBLEM 5 OF 8

Burning or electrical smell

NORMAL	NOT NORMAL
Dusty smell at first startup	**Hot plastic or electrical**

How to recognize it

A dusty smell for a few minutes at the first heat of the season is normal. Hot plastic, rubber or electrical smells are not.

Prevent it next time

- Vacuum around the furnace before heating season.
- Keep storage away from the unit.
- Change filters on schedule.

Why it matters

Electrical smells can mean a motor or wiring is overheating.

Signs to look for

- Smell lasting more than an hour
- Hot plastic or rubber smell
- Smoke from vents
- Breaker keeps tripping

Do this now

1. Turn the system off at the thermostat and switch.
2. If you see smoke, leave and call 911.
3. Don't restart it until checked.

What the pro will do

1. Checks motors, wiring and the heat exchanger.
2. Finds the source of the smell.
3. Makes it safe before turning it back on.

Call today. Don't run the system until it's checked.

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06 CALL THIS WEEK

PROBLEM 6 OF 8

AC not cooling

CHECK FIRST
Filter, breaker, thermostat

OUTDOOR UNIT
Fan should be spinning

How to recognize it

The AC runs but the house stays warm, vents blow warm air, or the outdoor unit is silent.

Prevent it next time

- Change the filter monthly in summer.
- Keep two feet clear around the outdoor unit.
- Book a cooling tune-up each spring.

Common causes

A dirty filter or coil, a refrigerant leak, a failed capacitor or a tripped breaker.

Signs to look for

- Warm air from vents
- Outdoor fan not spinning
- Weak airflow
- Humid, sticky air

Do this now

1. Set the thermostat to cool, a few degrees below room temperature.
2. Replace the filter.
3. Clear leaves and debris around the outdoor unit.

What the pro will do

1. Checks refrigerant, capacitor and contactor.
2. Cleans coils if needed.
3. Tests cooling before leaving.

> Call this week; today in extreme heat or for elderly residents.

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07 CALL THIS WEEK

PROBLEM 7 OF 8

Frozen coil or ice on the unit

AC IN SUMMER	HEAT PUMP IN WINTER
Ice means a problem	**Light frost is normal**

How to recognize it

Ice on the refrigerant lines, the indoor coil or the outdoor unit, often with weak airflow.

Prevent it next time

- Keep a clean filter in place.
- Keep supply vents open.
- Clear snow and ice from a heat pump's sides.

Common causes

A clogged filter, blocked airflow, a refrigerant leak or a defrost problem on a heat pump.

Signs to look for

- Ice on copper lines
- Water around the indoor unit as it melts
- Weak airflow
- Heat pump fully iced over

Do this now

1. Turn cooling off and run the fan to thaw it.
2. Replace the filter.
3. Put towels down for melting water.

What the pro will do

1. Thaws the coil and checks airflow.
2. Looks for refrigerant leaks.
3. Tests the defrost cycle on heat pumps.

> Call this week.

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08 NOT URGENT

PROBLEM 8 OF 8

Thermostat problem

FIX FIRST
Batteries and settings

COMMON ISSUE
Wrong mode or schedule

How to recognize it

A blank screen, a system that ignores the setting, or temperatures that don't match the display.

Prevent it next time

- Replace batteries yearly.
- Keep it away from lamps, sun and drafts.
- Review the schedule each season.

Common causes

Dead batteries, a tripped breaker, loose wiring or a thermostat in direct sun or a draft.

Signs to look for

- Blank or flickering screen
- System ignores changes
- Reading doesn't match the room
- Runs at the wrong times

Do this now

1. Replace the batteries.
2. Check heat or cool mode and the schedule.
3. Check the furnace breaker.

What the pro will do

1. Checks wiring and power to the thermostat.
2. Calibrates or replaces it.
3. Sets up schedules with you.

> Not urgent unless you have no heat or cooling.

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SIDE BY SIDE

Furnace or heat pump?

Knowing your system helps you describe the problem.

Furnace or heat pump problem?

	Furnace	Heat pump
WHERE	Indoor unit, burns gas or oil	Outdoor unit, runs on electricity
WINTER FROST	Not applicable	Light frost is normal, heavy ice isn't
COLD-AIR COMPLAINT	Ignition or flame problem	Normal feel is cooler air; check if the house won't warm
SMELL	Gas smell means leave	Electrical smell means turn off

Still not sure? Describe what you see on the phone and a local pro can tell you which it is.

HOW TO

Before you call

Check the thermostat

Right mode, fresh batteries, a few degrees past room temperature.

Check the breaker

A tripped breaker or furnace switch is a common cause.

Change the filter

A clogged filter causes overheating, freezing and short cycling.

Protect your pipes

With no heat in a freeze, open cabinet doors and let faucets drip.

Know the danger signs

CO alarm, gas smell or smoke: get out and call 911.

Note the model

A photo of the unit's label helps the tech bring the right parts.

FILL THIS IN TODAY

My home at a glance

Five minutes now spares you a scramble later. Keep this page with the guide.

System type (furnace, heat pump, boiler):

Year installed and brand:

Filter size:

Last filter change:

Gas shut-off is located:

HVAC company we used before:

Notes:

THROUGH THE YEAR

Heating and cooling through the year

A few minutes each season heads off the most common problems.

Winter

- Change the filter monthly in heavy use.
- Keep snow off the heat pump.
- Test CO alarms.
- Keep vents clear.

Spring

- Book a cooling tune-up.
- Clear debris around the outdoor unit.
- Change the filter.
- Test the AC on a mild day.

Summer

- Change the filter monthly.
- Keep two feet clear around the unit.
- Watch for ice on the lines.
- Set a steady thermostat schedule.

Fall

- Book a heating tune-up.
- Test the heat before the first cold night.
- Replace CO alarm batteries.
- Vacuum around the furnace.

QUESTIONS

Heating and cooling questions

Why is my furnace blowing cold air?

Common causes are a thermostat set to fan instead of auto, a dirty filter causing overheating, or an ignition or pilot problem.

What should I check before calling for no heat?

Thermostat mode and batteries, the breaker, the furnace power switch and the air filter.

Is no heat an emergency?

In freezing weather, yes. Pipes can freeze and the home can get unsafe for young children and older adults.

What do I do if my carbon monoxide alarm goes off?

Get everyone outside, call 911 and don't go back in until it's cleared.

Is a burning smell from the furnace normal?

A dusty smell for a few minutes at the first heat of the season is normal. Hot plastic or electrical smells are not.

Why does my furnace keep turning on and off?

Short cycling often comes from a dirty filter, overheating, a failing flame sensor or a thermostat issue.

Heating and cooling questions (continued)

Why is my AC running but not cooling?

A dirty filter or coil, a refrigerant leak, a failed capacitor or a blocked outdoor unit are common causes.

Why is there ice on my AC lines?

Usually restricted airflow or a refrigerant leak. Turn cooling off, run the fan to thaw it, and call.

Is frost on my heat pump normal in winter?

Light frost is normal and clears in defrost mode. A unit fully encased in ice needs service.

How often should I change my furnace filter?

Check it monthly and replace it every one to three months, depending on the filter and pets.

Why is my thermostat blank?

Dead batteries, a tripped breaker or a blown fuse in the furnace are common causes.

Should I repair or replace my furnace?

Age, repair history and how well it heats all matter. A tech can walk you through the options.

CUT OUT AND KEEP

When something goes wrong

1. CO alarm or gas smell? Get everyone out and call 911.
2. No heat? Check the thermostat mode and batteries.
3. Check the breaker and the furnace power switch.
4. Replace a dirty filter.
5. In a freeze, open sink cabinets and let faucets drip.
6. Call an HVAC company and describe what the system is doing.

KEEP THIS NUMBER IN YOUR PHONE

(844) 511-3573

Scan for the online guide

with the 60-second problem finder and more answers.

hvacserviceline.com/hvac-troubleshooting-guide/

KEEP HANDY

Important numbers

Fill these in now, so you're not searching when something goes wrong.

Emergency: 911

Gas utility emergency line

Water utility

Electric utility

Plumber

Neighbor with a spare key

Policy number for your home

YOUR LOCAL PRO LINE

(844) 511-3573



Notes

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

HVAC Service Line

HVAC Service Line connects homeowners with independent local heating and cooling companies for furnaces, heat pumps, boilers, AC and thermostats.

How we're paid

HVAC Service Line is a referral service. Homeowners don't pay us. Independent local companies in our network pay us when we connect them with homeowners who call. We don't perform the work, and any work, timing and terms are agreed directly between you and the company.

Important

This guide is general information, not advice for your specific home. Every home is different. In an emergency, or if anyone is in danger, call 911 first. Before you hire anyone, confirm they hold the credentials required for the work in your area. Same-day service is subject to availability. Calls may be recorded for quality purposes.

Photos

Photographs are stock images from Pexels and Unsplash, used under each site's terms, to illustrate common problems. They don't show specific companies, jobs or customers. Any people shown are models.

No heat? No cool? Start here.
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HVAC Service Line

WHEN YOU NEED HELP

One call to a local pro

CALL

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HVAC Service Line is a referral service connecting homeowners with independent local companies.