



# Red-Tagging Tips for Consumers



*Being told that operating your furnace is dangerous to your property and the health of those inside your home can be a frightening, high-pressure situation. This process, called 'red-tagging,' usually happens when a technician is inspecting or performing maintenance on your furnace. It is essential to understand this process as well as options available to homeowners. Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota (BBB), with help from representatives of the Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) industry, outline and explain the red-tagging process for homeowners. Research HVAC businesses by consulting Better Business Bureau at 800-646-6222 or [bbb.org](http://bbb.org) before you make a final decision.*

## What is red-tagging?

If the operation of a furnace would jeopardize or is jeopardizing the health of occupants of the home, it may get red-tagged. In the past, businesses would place a red tag on the furnace to alert people that it was unsafe and needed to be shut off. Although most businesses no longer use red tags, the term remains. When a furnace is a danger to anyone or anything around it, it may be shut down/red-tagged.

## How does red-tagging happen?

The most common reason for red-tagging a furnace is due to a crack in the heat exchanger. A cracked heat exchanger allows flue gases, one of the most dangerous being carbon monoxide (CO), to be released into the airstream of the home, which is hazardous to breathe. Any amounts of CO in the breathable airstream may cause the furnace to be red-tagged. Some other causes for high CO levels may include issues with gas pressure or a furnace having dirty burners. A cracked heat exchanger is not the only reason for red-tagging a furnace. Other causes may include gas leaks or a compromised venting system. A technician may red tag a furnace if they believe it is no longer safe to run and cannot repair it onsite.

## What should you be aware of?

When comparing businesses, ask them to explain their tune-up checklist. They should be able to explain the checklist in detail, and it should include a comprehensive inspection of the furnace. Businesses may advertise a low-cost or free tune-up offer as an opportunity to get into your home. Some businesses that offer free services or inspections can tell you if the furnace is safe or not, but will be unable to fix existing issues without charging additional service fees. If a product or service is recommended, it may not mean that it is required or that a given part is bad. Some parts can be tested electronically and found to be outside of manufacturer's tolerances. These parts are typically nearing the end of their useful life, but it is up to you to decide if they should be replaced or not.



A tune-up can take up to an hour and a half to access the heat exchanger and determine whether or not the furnace is safe. A furnace may still heat your home but be unsafe to operate. If there is a safety issue, such as a crack in the heat exchanger, contact the manufacturer to see if it is under warranty.

## What options do you have and what to expect after the unit is red-tagged?

Should the furnace be red-tagged, cutting the wires or disassembling the furnace is unnecessary and should not be allowed. Experts inform us each furnace has the capability of being turned off by a switch, in the electrical panel or by shutting off the gas. The business should offer multiple options over a wide price range if the furnace is red-tagged. Replacing the furnace may not be the only option. If the heat exchanger is cracked, calling the manufacturer can help to determine if it is under warranty. However, even if the heat exchanger is covered under warranty, you may still have to pay for labor to have it installed.

The business will provide a summary of the cause for red-tagging the furnace. Whenever possible, it is best to view the problem with the furnace in person while the technician is onsite. If you are uncomfortable with the information provided, get a second opinion from another business. You should expect to pay for a service call for a second opinion.



Experts warn that businesses pressuring consumers to select a same-day installation offer may be a sign of a scam. Reputable

businesses should encourage customers to take time to decide what option is best for them. Temporary heating options, such as electric space heaters or home fireplaces, may be available to heat the home, while you are considering the options available. Temporary heating options can heat the home sufficiently for a few days but likely would not prevent pipes from freezing if this were the only heating source over a more extended period. If you trust that the company diagnosing your issues is working in your best interest, they should be able to work with you to set up a schedule to complete the work.

## What questions should you ask?

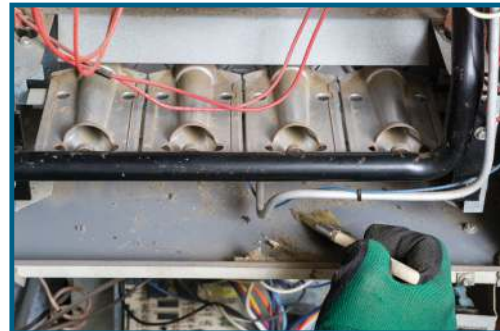
- **Is the service technician paid hourly or on commission?** Experts warn that technicians paid on commission may be more likely to recommend service or find problems with the furnace.
- **Are they checking the operation of the furnace or are they cleaning and adjusting the furnace as necessary?** If the business is

reviewing the operation, they should be able to tell you if the furnace is operating safely, but would charge additional fees to correct the problem.

- **What is included on the tune-up checklist?** The business should have a detailed checklist they can share with customers to better understand the costs. The more areas being checked, the better value for your money. However, not all areas of the checklist may apply to your furnace.
- **Industry professionals recommend asking the business as many questions you feel necessary to feel comfortable with the service and process.** A reputable business will encourage you to be present to observe the inspection or tune-up. If there is a problem with the furnace, being present allows you to see the issue firsthand.

Be sure to consult Better Business Bureau and research any businesses before making a purchasing decision at 800-646-6222 or visit:

[bbb.org](http://bbb.org)



*These self-regulatory standards were created by Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota, with input from businesses in the HVAC Industry, to create an ethical marketplace where buyers and sellers trust each other.*



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