

DO I NEED A DUCT TEST— OR A REFRIGERANT CHARGE TEST— OR BOTH?

Effective January 1st 2010, California contractors in climate zones 2, and 9 through 16, will be required to do duct sealing when changing out HVAC equipment (or adding or replacing more than 40 feet of ductwork in unconditioned space) in existing residential buildings. Ducts that leak more than 15% (6% for newly constructed buildings or an entirely new duct system) must be repaired to reduce the leaks. After your contractor tests and fixes the ducts, you choose whether to have an approved third-party field verifier check to make sure the duct testing and sealing was done properly or to have your house included in a random sample where one in seven duct systems are checked. Third party field verification is performed by a certified field verification and diagnostic testing rater (HERS rater). These new requirements apply when replacing the air



HERS rater pressure testing a duct system

handler, the outdoor condensing unit of a split system air conditioner or heat pump, cooling or heating coil, or the furnace heat exchanger.

These replacements are considered “alterations” under the Energy Efficiency Standards of the California Energy Commission, Title 24

WHY DID THE CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION INSTITUTE THESE NEW STANDARDS?

The greatest energy use in California homes is for central air conditioning and heating. Most homes with central air conditioning and heating systems have ducts that were never properly sealed.

“The average home’s ducts leak around 30 percent of the conditioned air outside the home. These leaks are taking money straight out of your pocketbook. “

Properly sealed ducts will lower your energy bills, reduce pollution inside your home, and help to avoid a repeat of the inconvenience and health and safety risks that we suffered during the power blackouts in 2000.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER REQUIRED TESTS?

In addition to the duct sealing requirements described, when a split space conditioning system is “altered” in residential buildings in climate zones 2 and 8 through 15, contractors are required to do a refrigerant charge measurement using Commission-approved protocols. This must be verified by a certified

HERS rater.



Additionally, if your installation includes all new equipment and ductwork, your contractor must verify the airflow in the system is at least 350 cfm per nominal ton and the wattage for the fan is equal to or less than 0.58 watts per cfm.

ARE THERE EXCEPTIONS TO THESE DUCT SEALING STANDARDS?

Yes.

1. Duct systems that are documented to have been previously sealed as confirmed through field verification and diagnostic testing (tested by a HERS rater).
2. Duct systems with 40 linear feet or less in unconditioned spaces.
3. Existing duct systems constructed, insulated, or sealed with asbestos.

DO I REALLY NEED TO DO THESE TESTS?

Yes. It is the law.

Besides it being the law, if your contractor suggests that you don’t have to have these tests performed, find another contractor. These tests will save energy — monthly savings for your pocketbook—along with improved health, safety and comfort.