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## Building Success 101

*Q: What is a MicroCHP system?*

A: MicroCHP stands for Micro (or small-scale) Combined Heat and Power. As the name indicates, this new breed of mechanical equipment uses an internal combustion engine, usually fueled by natural gas or propane, to produce heat for a home (or a zone of a larger home) as well as electricity to offset or supplement the traditional power grid from the utility.

### Heating and Cooling System Care

A new home today is built to consume less energy than those of just a decade ago. Such a home is nearly airtight with controlled fresh-air ventilation for energy efficiency and improved indoor air quality.

To heat and cool a home built for high performance, a professional builder can select top-quality heating and cooling equipment to ensure year-round comfort and energy savings. However, if the owners want that equipment to perform as designed, they must maintain it.

Fortunately, the proper maintenance of heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems (commonly referred to as "HVAC") does not require homeowners to be mechanical contractors. A few easy steps for preventive care, conducted on schedule, are usually all it takes to keep those systems humming at peak performance.

The vast majority of residential HVAC systems are "forced air" configurations. The system consists of a centrally located condenser along with a furnace and blower units that push heated or cooled air through a network of large pipes (or ducts) into the rooms of the house through vent registers.

A forced air system relies on other ducts to suck in and return air to the system from registers near the ceiling. "Return" air is either recycled through the system or exhausted to the outside, keeping the inside air fresh and comfortable.

Maintaining this system starts at the blower, which circulates a high volume of air. The blower contains a removable filter to prevent small particles and allergens from contaminating the indoor air. For most HVAC systems, the filter should be replaced every three months. Some newer, high-performance systems may have filters that only need to be replaced semi-annually or even just once a year. Consult your owner's manual for frequency of replacement as well as size of filter. Filters of all sizes are available at most home improvement and hardware stores and are easy to remove and reinsert into the blower.

The next component to maintain is the ductwork. It's a good idea, even in a new house, to have the ducts cleaned out at least every two years. In fact, most professional builders will offer or simply conduct a thorough duct cleaning before the owners of a new house take occupancy. Responsible builders do not want their buyers to be greeted with a puff of construction dust the first time the HVAC system is used! Two years later, the owners should contact a local duct-cleaning service or ask their builder for a recommendation.

On the same every-other-year schedule, the entire HVAC system should be checked by a professional mechanical contractor. Again, your builder can recommend a reputable



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a reputable service, ideally the company that installed the system. This check-up will ensure that the system is operating properly; bringing enough fresh air into the house, providing adequate ventilation and maximizing energy efficiency. Homeowners can do random spot checks by inspecting the outside of the equipment for any leaks, cracks, or other abnormalities and reporting those to their builder or HVAC service contractor.

This type of simple and inexpensive maintenance program will help to keep the HVAC system running at optimum performance for many years.

Warm regards,

*Brian*

Brian Gentry  
& the Gentry Family



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