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Yeah it's stinkin' hot! So, did you change out your air conditioner filter?

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By Roger Yohem, Inside Tucson Business |

When was the last time you changed the air filter on your air conditioner? (More on that later.)

As the humidity rises in step with 107-degree days and anticipation of monsoon storms, this weather is good business for air conditioning companies. At \$500 a pop for a condenser fan motor and \$2,000 to replace a compressor conk-out, big bucks are flowing to keep the cold air going.

But it can be too much of a good thing.

Many A/C pros would rather see homeowners get a pre-season tune-up, like in March. That could save mega-bucks in equipment failures, avoid overheated casas, and minimize 60-hour work weeks for service technicians.

"If people serviced their systems before it hits 110, a lot of maintenance issues would be caught. With the heat, worn parts and mechanical parts are failing fast," said Wade Hamstra, general manager of Hamstra Heating & Cooling, 2035 E. 17th St.

Now well into summer's first sustained heat wave, service calls have soared. At Rincon Air, 4810 E. Speedway, calls have tripled and appointments are four days out. Manager Neil Chamberlain estimated his techs replaced about 60 compressors last week.

Tony Sanchez, owner of Sayco Heating & Air Conditioning, 350 E. Prince Road, said his firm has replaced many more systems than motors and compressors.

"We do what's best for the customer. When equipment is 15 or 20 years old, it can make more sense to install a complete new system instead of just the compressor," he said. "We're not the norm, we tend to specialize in higher efficiency systems."

Most companies rotate schedules to keep their techs fresh "to avoid burn-out," added Sanchez. But things will get worse before they get better. Higher humidity and overnight temperatures in the 80s will require cooling 24/7. That will super-stress systems, causing even more breakdowns.

And when the monsoon storms come, people inadvertently put more pressure on their compressor. To enjoy the rain-cooled air, they shut off the A/C and open their windows.

"That's bad. The worst thing to do, let that moisture in," said Hamstra. "For the next two days, the A/C will run twice as hard to remove all that humidity from the home."