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This is a controversial subject in families worldwide, believe me. My significant other couldn't wait for the air conditioning while I dreaded the installation. I'm cold so much of the year in Oregon, I enjoy the summer heat. Well, try telling that to a man who works in the hot sun every day! Bottom line: Most of us want to come home to a cool house.

So what should you consider before making such a big purchase? Not too much, really, but the few things you should take into account can make the difference.

- v First, remember that all brands are different but primarily the same. So let me repeat myself: sign with a company that makes you feel most comfortable. The equipment will hold its own, (knock on wood) the company you sign with is who you will be dealing with during the life of your equipment.
- v That aside, make sure that no company is trying to sell you more capacity than you really need. This doesn't mean if the contract is abnormally high that they're trying to take you for a ride; a Cadillac costs more than a Honda. But compare the equipment closely to see if someone has oversized your unit. If a unit is oversized, this usually means that the unit will "short-cycle" when it cools, this is very hard on equipment. To sum it up, it will cause premature aging. And there's no wrinkle cream for air conditioners.
- v You should also be aware of the ratings on the units you've been quoted. The rating you'll hear most is the SEER (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio) The department of Energy standards are currently a minimum of 13 SEER. However, these ratings can range from 13 to 18 SEER. 13 & 14 SEER units are usually recommended because they are the least expensive up front and generally require the least repairs over time. Not to mention, in Oregon we only use cooling approximately 3 months out of the year, most assume that anything over 14 SEER is somewhat of a waste.
- v Next, of course, is the type of refrigerant used. Most of the basic models used today run on R-22 coolant. This refrigerant is being phased out, though not for a few years, and is being replaced with R-410A Freon. Bryant calls this 'Puron,' Amana 'Ultron - It's all R-410A. To be on the safe side, I would recommend installing a unit that uses this new environmentally friendly refrigerant, in the future it will be beneficial.

Finally, if your family is gone during long periods of the day, you might consider a programmable thermostat. Your equipment can use less energy if it doesn't have to cool the house all day while no one is home. Not to mention most of us tend to over-work our air conditioner because we want instant gratification. Well, the best way to get this isn't to walk into a complete oven at 5:30pm and turn the AC down so far that it has to work double time to cool the house. If you program it to come on one or two hours before you get home, it has plenty of time to run at its own pace to reach your desired temperature.

If you're like me and want to open a window for some fresh air in the summer, better to leave the air conditioner on (and "cool the entire neighborhood") than to make it work too hard to cool down the house after you shut the windows. Amazingly, "cooling the entire neighborhood" costs you less!

If you're still undecided whether to repair or replace a severely injured air conditioner, consider:

1. Cost to repair vs. replace
2. Warranty Coverage
3. How long do you plan to live in this house? Consider the investment carefully.

Whatever you decide, good luck and enjoy the cool summer evenings ahead in your home!

