

Steam Conversion Conversation – and more

(continued)

This is a good solution, but all the plumbing can make it a bit spendy and there's the removal of the steam radiators and the steam pipes, which likely means an asbestos contractor. It also means you might have to open a wall or two through which to run second floor plumbing and you'll have to get a paint-brush out and paint the now exposed wall behind those removed radiators. A less costly hot-water option is to install a hot water boiler and run the hot water through your steam radiators. Although the steam radiators were not designed for hot water, they could work – assuming they don't leak. Hot water is not as hot as steam, so you might find it to be less effective at heating than steam. Furthermore, if you're already short a couple steam radiators, you may find yourself short of heating ability on those really cold days. Remember, too, that your basement was heated by all that steam heat radiating off the steam pipes and the steam hot water heater. When you switch to natural gas, you should give some thought to providing some radiators in your basement.

Hybrid Option

Some folks that I've spoken with, who have 1½-story or two-story houses, are planning on installing hot water fin-tube radiators on the first floor and electric heat on the second floor. That sounds like a pretty good option. It may not capture all the lower cost benefits of heating with natural gas versus electric, but it is less expensive and less invasive than installing hot-water fin-tube throughout. It may require an upgrade to the electric service, but in situations where the service is outdated anyway, that is a good thing.

Capturing that wasted space. Here's your Opportunity

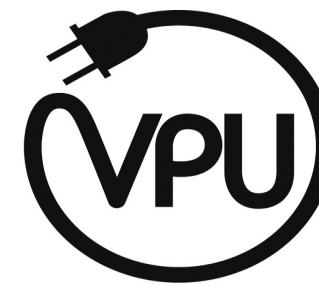
Give this some thought. How many times have you wished those radiators weren't there? When you get up from the dinner table do you bump into the radiator? How about the bedroom where you can't turn the bed this way because the radiator gets in the way. The putrid green wall behind that radiator, when's the last time it saw a coat of paint? Here's your chance. If you switch to fin-tube radiators you'll gain that space. You might think it won't amount to much, but you'll be pleasantly surprised. But here's an even better idea. There's a newer product out there that essentially is a forced air system but it doesn't use big ducts. It flows air quickly through small insulated tubes. These terminate in a small two-inch opening in the floor or the ceiling tucked away in the corner. The beauty of this option is you have now converted to a forced air system. You can heat it with a heat pump/AC unit (as mentioned above) that has a natural gas hot water heater that doubles as an extra heat source on cold winter days. In addition, you've recovered the radiator space, you don't lose the trim to the baseboard radiators and no longer is your space heating system in the way so you can decorate the way you want.

Folks, it's worth it to put a little TLC into your home. We know this is change and most people don't get excited about change, but try to look beyond that and see it as an opportunity to revitalize that classic home. . . . one room at a time. And when you're finished you'll kick up your feet and say, "I love my home."

Two final notes

Old radiators have value - If you're removing those radiators, I'm told there may be people interested in paying good money for them intact. But, if you don't want the hassle you should be able to get some casholla at the scrap metal yard.

CIP rebates - Please remember that the Utility provides rebates on various heating alternatives so if you're installing an air source heat pump you are likely eligible for a rebate. Please talk to your contractor about this.



Virginia Public Utilities

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VPU – QUICK NOTES

KNOW THE SMELL OF NATURAL GAS—BE SAFE!
If there is a faint smell of natural gas, call VPU at 218-748-7540.

If in doubt, leave the building immediately & call 9-1-1.

STREET LIGHT OUT?

If you notice a street light that is burnt out or flickering, please call VPU at 748-7540 so that we may get it fixed and keep our streets bright!

Before You Dig,

Contact Gopher State One Call

Dial 1 8-1-1 or 800-252-1166 or www.gopherstateonecall.org

CHECK YOUR WALL PATCHES

If you have steam heat in your home, or an abandoned steam line to your home....

Periodically check the wall patch where the steam enters your building for leaks.

If you have a vacant property please check property often, as damage can occur quickly...

Call 748-7540 with questions.

THE VPU QUARTERLY

APRIL 2018

The VPU office will be closed on the following dates:

May 28, 2018

July 4, 2018

Steam Conversion Conversation – and more

(by Bill Hafdahl)

We at the Utility understand that this conversion process will be a hassle and that some of you are just downright nervous about working through this. But, that said, it is also an opportunity. . . an opportunity to modernize not only the heat system in your house, but also the living spaces. Yes, a good number of you may not be so enthusiastic about doing a "This Old House" style home make-over, but I want to encourage the rest of you to see this as a first step in a longer term effort to breathe new life into that old house.

As you may know, in order to access the Utility's loan funds we are requiring that you provide two quotes (I personally would get more quotes). This is for two reasons: 1) to encourage competition among contractors and 2) so that you get more than one perspective as to your best options. This article provides a cursory overview of your options.

If you have a forced air system

What are your options if you have a house where the heat is distributed via forced air? With forced air systems the conversion will really only involve changing out the heat source. The heat distribution system wouldn't need to be touched. So one of your options is to simply install a natural gas furnace in the same place that the steam "heat exchanger" was. Or, a second option could be to use a newer technology, a heat pump/furnace combination. Heat pumps are basically air-conditioners run in reverse. They take the heat from the outside air and bring it into your house. They are very effective in the fall and spring, and, with the support of a gas furnace, they can handle our coldest winter days. One additional benefit of this system is that the heat pump doubles as an air conditioner in the summer, so you can take that old window AC unit out.

If you have a steam radiator system

If you have the old steam radiators through which steam has been flowing for nearly a century or steam baseboard radiators, one option could be to look into purchasing a steam boiler. I don't know much about them but essentially the boiler makes your steam instead of us making it. You run that steam through your radiators just the same way you have been. It's not a bad idea, because your steam radiators were designed for steam. These boilers have been around a bit so I'm told they are a tested technology. They're not quite as efficient as the standard water boilers, but they're close. A second option is to convert to a hot water system. This could involve taking out the steam radiators and re-plumbing with fin-tube baseboard radiators throughout the house, and installing a hot water boiler. The beauty of a hot water boiler with newly re-plumbed fin-tube radiators is that you can zone off the floors to better match the heating of your house with where you are in the house. You could have a basement zone, a first floor zone, a second floor zone and a zone for your water heater. That's what I did in my 11th St house – you never run out of hot water with this set-up, which is great for large families.