

OTTAWA HVAC PRO

Emergency Repairs

No heat, no cooling, and what counts as an HVAC
emergency in Ottawa

10 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

ottawahvacpro.ca/construction-brain

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Q1

Is a cracked heat exchanger an emergency?

Yes, a cracked heat exchanger is a serious safety emergency and you should stop using your furnace immediately.

A cracked heat exchanger is one of the most dangerous furnace problems a homeowner can face. The heat exchanger is the component that separates combustion gases — including **carbon monoxide (CO)** — from the air that circulates through your home. When it cracks, those toxic gases can leak directly into your living space. Carbon monoxide is odourless and colourless, meaning you won't know you're being poisoned until symptoms appear: headaches, dizziness, nausea, or worse.

Turn your furnace off at the thermostat right now if a technician has told you your heat exchanger is cracked. Don't run it "just for a little while" to stay warm — even short exposure to elevated CO levels can be dangerous, especially for children, elderly family members, or anyone with respiratory conditions. Make sure your **carbon monoxide detectors are working** and check that everyone in the home feels well. If anyone is experiencing symptoms, leave the house and call 911.

Ottawa-specific context: Ottawa winters are brutal, and losing heat can feel like a crisis in itself — but a cracked heat exchanger makes running your furnace more dangerous than having no heat at all. Ottawa HVAC Pro technicians carry equipment to perform **combustion analysis and CO testing** to confirm a diagnosis, because unfortunately, a cracked heat exchanger is sometimes misdiagnosed. It's worth getting a second opinion before committing to a full furnace replacement, which is typically the required fix since heat exchangers generally cannot be repaired under TSSA guidelines.

Replacement costs for a furnace in Ottawa typically run **\$3,500 – \$6,500** depending on efficiency rating, and a cracked heat exchanger on an older furnace usually means replacement is the right call anyway.

Your next steps: Turn off the furnace, ensure your CO alarms are functioning, and call a licensed HVAC technician today — this is not a "schedule it for next week" situation. Ottawa HVAC Pro offers emergency service for exactly this kind of urgent heating issue. For a free estimate on furnace replacement, reach out to us directly.

Q2

What should I do if my AC is smoking?

Turn off your air conditioning system immediately and do not use it until a licensed HVAC technician inspects it. Smoking from an AC unit indicates a serious electrical or mechanical problem that could lead to fire or

equipment damage.

Immediate steps to take: First, turn off the AC at your thermostat, then go to your electrical panel and switch off the breaker for the air conditioning system. This ensures the unit is completely de-energized. Do not attempt to investigate the source of the smoke yourself, as this could involve live electrical components.

Common causes of smoking AC units include overheated electrical components, a seized compressor motor, burned-out capacitors, or damaged wiring. In Ottawa's hot summers, overworked systems can experience electrical failures, especially in older units or those that haven't received regular maintenance. Sometimes what appears to be "smoke" could actually be refrigerant vapor from a leak, but this still requires immediate professional attention.

Safety considerations are paramount with any smoking electrical appliance. While AC units don't typically produce carbon monoxide (since they don't burn fuel), electrical fires are a real risk. Keep the area around your outdoor unit clear and ensure good ventilation if the smoking occurred from your indoor unit.

Next steps: Contact a licensed HVAC technician for an emergency service call to diagnose the problem. Depending on the age and condition of your system, this could range from a relatively simple capacitor replacement (\$200-400) to major component failure requiring system replacement. Don't attempt to restart the system until it's been professionally inspected and repaired.

For emergency HVAC service in Ottawa, we can provide same-day diagnosis to get your cooling restored safely.

Q3

Can I run my furnace with a broken blower motor?

No, you should not run your furnace with a broken blower motor. The blower motor is essential for circulating heated air throughout your home and preventing dangerous overheating of the heat exchanger.

Why a broken blower motor is dangerous: When the blower motor fails, heated air cannot circulate properly through your home's ductwork. This causes the heat exchanger to overheat, which can crack the metal and potentially allow carbon monoxide to leak into your living space. Modern furnaces have safety switches that should shut down the system when overheating occurs, but you shouldn't rely on these as your only protection.

Signs your blower motor has failed include no air coming from vents even when the furnace is running, unusual grinding or squealing noises, or the furnace cycling on and off frequently. You might also notice that your thermostat shows the system is running, but no warm air is being distributed through your home.

In Ottawa's winter climate, a broken blower motor needs immediate attention. Running your furnace without proper air circulation not only creates safety risks but can also cause expensive damage to other furnace components. The heat exchanger replacement alone can cost \$1,500-\$3,000, often making more sense to replace the entire furnace.

What to do immediately: Turn off your furnace at the thermostat and the electrical disconnect switch. Check that your carbon monoxide detectors are working properly. If you smell gas or your CO alarm sounds, leave your home immediately and call 911, then contact Enbridge at 1-866-763-5427.

Professional repair is required since blower motor replacement involves electrical work and proper system testing. In Ottawa, blower motor replacement typically costs \$400-\$800 depending on your furnace model. For a free estimate on your furnace repair, request a quote from Ottawa HVAC Pro - we provide emergency HVAC service throughout Ottawa and can diagnose the issue safely.

Q4

Is it an emergency if my furnace stops working in winter?

Yes, a furnace failure in winter is considered an emergency, especially when outdoor temperatures drop below freezing. Without heat, your home can become dangerously cold within hours, and frozen pipes can cause thousands of dollars in water damage.

Immediate steps to take: First, check your thermostat settings and ensure it's set to "heat" mode. Replace your furnace filter if it's dirty, as a clogged filter can cause the system to shut down. Check your electrical panel for tripped breakers and ensure the furnace power switch is on. If these basic checks don't restore heat, you need professional help immediately.

In Ottawa's harsh winters, indoor temperatures can drop to dangerous levels quickly when heating fails. Prolonged exposure to cold can lead to hypothermia, particularly for elderly residents, young children, or those with health conditions. Additionally, when indoor temperatures drop below 10°C (50°F), water pipes can begin to freeze, potentially bursting and causing extensive water damage to your home.

Safety considerations are critical during furnace emergencies. Never attempt to repair gas components yourself - this requires a TSSA-licensed technician. Avoid using alternative heating sources like ovens, barbecues, or portable propane heaters indoors, as these can produce deadly carbon monoxide. If you smell gas, leave your home immediately and call Enbridge at 1-866-763-5427.

Emergency HVAC service is available in Ottawa for situations like this. Most reputable HVAC companies, including Ottawa HVAC Pro, offer 24/7 emergency service during winter months. While emergency service calls typically cost \$150-\$250 plus repairs, this investment protects your family's safety and prevents costly pipe damage. For immediate assistance with your heating emergency, contact a licensed HVAC technician right away.

Q5

What should I do if I smell gas from my furnace?

If you smell gas from your furnace, leave your home immediately and call Enbridge Gas at 1-866-763-5427 from outside your house. Do not turn any lights on or off, don't use electrical switches, and don't try to locate the source of the leak.

Once you're safely outside, call Enbridge's 24-hour emergency line - they will dispatch a technician immediately to shut off your gas supply and investigate the leak. **Never ignore a gas smell** as natural gas leaks can lead to

explosions or carbon monoxide poisoning. Even a small leak can become dangerous quickly, especially in enclosed spaces like basements where furnaces are typically located.

After Enbridge has made your home safe, you'll need a **TSSA-licensed gas technician** to inspect your furnace and repair any issues before the gas can be restored. In Ottawa's cold climate, gas leaks often occur due to aging connections, cracked heat exchangers, or loose fittings that expand and contract with temperature changes. These repairs must be completed by a licensed professional - attempting DIY repairs on gas appliances is both dangerous and illegal in Ontario.

Do not re-enter your home until Enbridge gives you the all-clear. If you're displaced overnight due to a gas leak, document everything for insurance purposes. Most homeowner's insurance policies cover temporary accommodation costs when your home is uninhabitable due to gas leaks or other emergencies.

Once the immediate danger is resolved, have your furnace thoroughly inspected to prevent future leaks. Regular annual maintenance can catch potential gas leak issues before they become emergencies, keeping your Ottawa home safe through our harsh winters.

Q6

Should I turn off my furnace if it smells like burning?

Yes, you should turn off your furnace immediately if you smell burning, especially if it's a strong, acrid, or unusual burning smell. This is a safety precaution that could prevent a potential fire hazard or equipment damage.

Different burning smells indicate different levels of concern. A light dusty smell when you first turn on your furnace for the season is usually normal - it's just dust burning off the heat exchanger after months of sitting idle. However, strong burning smells, electrical burning odors, or smells like burning plastic, rubber, or oil require immediate attention and the system should be shut off.

Common causes of concerning burning smells include: overheating due to a dirty air filter restricting airflow, electrical problems with wiring or components, a cracked heat exchanger, or foreign objects that have fallen into the system. In Ottawa's climate, furnaces work hard during our cold winters, and overheating issues can develop when systems aren't properly maintained.

After turning off your furnace, check your air filter first - a severely clogged filter is the most common cause of overheating and burning smells. If the filter is clean or replacing it doesn't resolve the issue, don't attempt to restart the system. Continuing to run a furnace with a burning smell can lead to expensive damage or create safety

hazards.

For your safety and to protect your investment, have a licensed HVAC technician inspect the system before using it again. We provide emergency HVAC service in Ottawa and can quickly diagnose the source of burning smells. It's always better to be cautious with heating equipment - a service call is much less expensive than dealing with fire damage or a complete system replacement.

Who do I call for emergency furnace repair in Ottawa?

For emergency furnace repair in Ottawa, call a licensed HVAC contractor immediately - Ottawa HVAC Pro offers 24/7 emergency service for heating system failures.

When your furnace stops working, especially during Ottawa's harsh winters, you need **immediate professional help from TSSA-licensed technicians**. Emergency situations include complete heating system failure, strange burning smells, unusual noises, or if your carbon monoxide detector is sounding. Never attempt to repair gas furnaces yourself - this work requires proper licensing and can be extremely dangerous.

Before calling for emergency service, quickly check your thermostat settings, ensure your furnace filter isn't completely blocked, and verify your circuit breaker hasn't tripped. However, if you smell gas, hear loud banging or grinding noises, or see visible damage to your furnace, turn off the system immediately and call for emergency repair without delay.

In Ottawa's climate, **furnace emergencies can't wait until morning** - frozen pipes and dangerous indoor temperatures can develop within hours. Licensed emergency HVAC services typically charge \$150-\$250 for the service call plus repair costs, but this investment protects your family's safety and prevents costly secondary damage like burst pipes.

Emergency furnace repair should only be performed by G2 or G3 licensed gas technicians who carry proper insurance and follow TSSA safety protocols. Look for contractors who offer guaranteed response times and have the parts inventory to complete common repairs immediately.

For immediate emergency furnace repair in Ottawa, contact Ottawa HVAC Pro - we're available 24/7 with licensed technicians ready to restore your heating safely and efficiently.

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What do I do if my heat pump is making a grinding noise?

Turn off your heat pump immediately - a grinding noise typically indicates a serious mechanical problem that could cause expensive damage if the system continues running.

Grinding noises in heat pumps usually point to worn bearings in the fan motor, a failing compressor, or debris caught in the outdoor unit's fan. These are not normal operating sounds and require immediate attention. The grinding could also indicate that internal components are rubbing against each other due to loose mounting hardware or a shifted component.

Check the outdoor unit first for any obvious debris like sticks, leaves, or ice buildup around the fan. However, don't attempt to remove anything while the unit is running or try to restart it if the grinding persists. In Ottawa's climate, ice buildup can sometimes cause similar sounds, but true grinding typically indicates mechanical wear rather than just ice.

This is definitely a job for a licensed HVAC technician - heat pumps contain refrigerant under pressure and electrical components that require proper training to service safely. Continuing to run a heat pump with grinding noises often turns a moderate repair into a complete system replacement. Most grinding issues involve motor bearings, compressor problems, or fan assembly wear that requires professional diagnosis and repair.

Turn your system to emergency heat mode if available, or use backup heating while waiting for service. For emergency HVAC service in Ottawa, especially during winter months, don't wait - a failing heat pump in cold weather can leave you without heat entirely. We recommend having the system inspected within 24 hours to prevent further damage and ensure your home stays comfortable.

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What temperature is dangerous for pipes to freeze?

Pipes can start freezing when temperatures drop to 32°F (0°C), but the real danger zone begins when outdoor temperatures fall below 20°F (-7°C) for extended periods. However, pipes don't always freeze exactly at the freezing point due to factors like insulation, water movement, and thermal mass.

The most vulnerable pipes are those in **unheated areas** like basements, crawl spaces, attics, and exterior walls. In Ottawa's climate, we typically see pipe freezing issues when temperatures drop below -10°C (14°F) and stay there for several hours, especially with wind chill. Pipes in poorly insulated areas or near exterior walls can freeze even when indoor temperatures are comfortable.

Water expands about 9% when it freezes, creating tremendous pressure that can burst pipes and cause thousands of dollars in water damage. The pipes most at risk include those serving outdoor faucets, swimming pool supply lines, and water supply pipes in unheated interior spaces. Even a small crack can spray hundreds of gallons of water once it thaws.

In Ottawa, our harsh winters mean homeowners should take preventive action when **Environment Canada forecasts temperatures below -15°C for more than 6 hours**. This includes letting faucets drip slightly, opening cabinet doors under sinks near exterior walls, and ensuring your heating system is working properly. If you're going away during winter, never set your thermostat below 15°C (60°F).

If you suspect frozen pipes, turn off your main water supply immediately and call a licensed plumber. Never use open flames or high-heat devices to thaw pipes - this can cause fires or burst the pipes from rapid expansion. If your heating system fails during extreme cold, contact an emergency HVAC service right away to prevent both frozen pipes and carbon monoxide risks from improper heating attempts.

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What do I do if my carbon monoxide detector goes off?

If your carbon monoxide detector goes off, immediately evacuate everyone from your home and call 911.

This is a life-threatening emergency that requires immediate action.

Carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless gas that can be deadly within minutes at high concentrations. Your CO detector is designed to alert you before levels become fatal, but you must act quickly. Get everyone outside to fresh air immediately - don't stop to investigate the source, grab belongings, or turn off appliances. Once everyone is safely outside and accounted for, call 911 from a safe location.

Do not re-enter your home until emergency responders have cleared it as safe. Ottawa Fire Services will respond with specialized equipment to measure CO levels and identify the source. Common sources include malfunctioning furnaces, blocked vents, faulty gas fireplaces, or improperly vented appliances. Even if the alarm stops sounding, dangerous levels of CO may still be present.

In Ottawa's climate, CO incidents often spike during heating season when furnaces are working harder and vents can become blocked by snow or ice. After emergency responders clear your home, you'll need a licensed HVAC technician to inspect and repair any fuel-burning equipment before it's safe to use again. This is required work that must be done by TSSA-licensed professionals.

Once the immediate danger has passed, have all fuel-burning appliances professionally inspected before using them again. This includes your furnace, gas fireplace, water heater, and any other gas appliances. Ottawa HVAC Pro can provide emergency HVAC service to diagnose and repair CO-producing equipment safely.

Remember: **CO detectors save lives, but only if you respond immediately when they sound.** Never ignore a CO alarm or assume it's malfunctioning - always treat it as a real emergency.

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