

I need a new boiler for space heating. What should I buy?

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Elise from Montreal wrote: We bought a small warehouse that we converted into living space. Three years ago we changed all the piping for the hot water radiators. Now it is time to get rid of the very old and costly oil boiler. We are thinking of switching to an Electric boiler. Is this a good idea and who should we contact? Response: This is actually a very interesting question because it raises all kinds of problems in the heating industry. First, electricity is cheap in Quebec so this may be a good choice. In most of the country electricity is much more expensive. But then, oil prices are on the rise. In fact fuel costs are always a bit of a gamble and you need to ask around for an idea as to stability of gas, oil or electrical prices for the next 20 years. That's a tough one. But life is more complicated by the fact that boilers are usually installed by plumbers, but electrical boilers are usually installed by electricians. And what you really need is someone who can look at your existing system and determine if it is not more cost efficient for you to simply upgrade what you already have, and if you need something new, which way is the best way for you to go. If you switch from oil to gas, you have to get rid of the old boiler and the oil tank. If you move to electricity you will probably need to upgrade your electrical system. If you stay with oil, you can get modern efficient units and avoid the electrical upgrade and getting rid of the tank. If you just focus on the cost of the machine itself, you are not working with all the costs of a conversion. So who do you turn to? In this case, if you have really done your homework and have determined that electricity is the best way to go -- then have a couple of electricians come in and give you estimates for the job. If you are not so sure about all the costs, then I would hire a plumber to give you an evaluation of which way you should go. Notice that I am not saying have the plumber come in and give you an estimate for him to do the job. I am saying hire the plumber for between \$150 to \$250 to give you an independent expertise on what should be done. If you ask for an estimate, he will pitch you his product. If you pay for an expertise, you are more likely to get a real evaluation of which way is the best way to go. A hint is to find a plumbing company that regularly does insurance inspections. These guys are used to and equipped to do non-partial expertise. With this expertise in hand, you can then seek out bids to do a very specific job.

Keywords:

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