



[Home](#) > [Managing and Maintaining](#) > [Manage First Nation Properties](#) > [Maintenance Solutions](#)

How to Maintain a Heat Recovery Ventilator

Seven simple steps to keep your heat recovery ventilator (HRV) running at peak performance.

A heat recovery ventilator (HRV) brings fresh air into your home without losing heat. Properly maintained, an HRV can save energy costs in your housing project while maintaining a clean, healthy indoor environment.

You can extend the life and efficiency of your HRV by doing regular maintenance throughout the year. It actually only takes 7 simple steps to keep your HRV in peak condition:

Step 1: Turn off the HRV

For safety's sake, turn the HRV off and unplug it before starting any work on it.

Step 2: Clean or replace the air filters

Dirty or clogged filters can lower ventilation efficiency. You should clean or replace your filters every 2 months. Fortunately, if your HRV is easily accessible, this takes only 5 minutes to do. Filters in most new HRVs can be easily removed, vacuumed, and washed with mild soap and water. Older units have fully replaceable filters.

Step 3: Check outdoor intake and exhaust hoods

Remove leaves, waste paper or other items that might be blocking the outside vents. If these vents are blocked, your HRV won't function properly. During winter, clear away any snow or frost buildup blocking the vents.

Step 4: Inspect the condensate drain

Check to see if your HRV has a condensate drain. This is a pipe or plastic tube coming out of the bottom of the HRV. If it does, slowly pour about 2 litres of warm, clean water in each drain pan inside the HRV. If there's a backup, clean the drain until the water flows freely.

Step 5: Clean the heat exchange core

Check your HRV owner's manual for instructions on how to clean the heat exchange core. Vacuuming the core and washing it with soap and water will reduce dust that can build up inside the core.

Step 6: Clean grilles and inspect ductwork

Once a year, check the ductwork leading to and from your HRV. Remove and inspect the grilles covering the duct ends, then vacuum inside the ducts. If a more thorough cleaning is required, call your HRV service technician.

Step 7: Service the fans

Remove dirt that has accumulated on the blades by gently brushing them. Most new HRVs are designed to run continuously without lubrication. Older ones, however, need a few drops of motor lubricating oil in a designated oil intake. Check your HRV owner's manual for instructions on how to put oil in the intake.

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