HVAC PROS — GUIDE

SEER2 and efficiency rules: what to ask before replacement

Understand the rating change and request proof that the quoted system fits the installation location.

Updated November 10, 2026

SEER2 is a cooling efficiency rating under an updated test procedure. US Department of Energy, Purchasing Energy-Efficient Residential Central Air Conditioners, fetched 2026-11-10 says the test and rating changes took effect **January 1, 2023**. It identifies SEER2 as the cooling rating and HSPF2 as the heating rating. Do not compare an old SEER number with a new SEER2 number as if the test were unchanged.

A rating is not your bill

The DOE page above expresses SEER2 in British thermal units per watt-hour. Its cost comparisons use stated equipment, usage and electricity-price assumptions. Your building, climate, installation and operating habits can differ. Ask the contractor to state the assumptions behind any saving estimate. Do not accept an unexplained payback promise.

Location and equipment type matter

DOE Office of General Counsel, Regional Standards Enforcement, fetched 2026-11-10 explains that central air conditioner standards differ across the North, Southeast and Southwest. It says the applicable standard depends on the type of air conditioner and when and where it is installed. A national advertisement cannot establish compliance for a specific installation.

Ask the contractor to identify the current rule that applies to the exact equipment and location. Request the full indoor and outdoor model combination and the rating record used for the quote. Ask for an AHRI matched-system certificate if available. Record the proposed installation date. Have the contractor confirm the applicable requirements before you approve the order.

Compare the whole proposal

Ask about the rated efficiency, sizing basis, indoor equipment, thermostat compatibility and installation work. Use the same scope when comparing offers. Ask how the contractor will test operation after installation and what records you will receive.

ENERGY STAR's contractor hiring tips, fetched 2026-11-10, recommend evaluating the home, inspecting ducts and comparing written, itemized estimates. Better rated equipment does not remove the need to assess the property and installation.

Avoid these shortcuts

- Do not treat SEER2 as a measure of furnace fuel efficiency.
- Do not apply a US regional rule to a Canadian installation.
- Do not infer a matched system's rating from an outdoor-unit marketing claim alone.
- Do not assume a higher rating guarantees a particular bill reduction.

For Canadian work, ask the installer to name the applicable Canadian and provincial requirements. This guide does not supply a Canadian compliance table. Keep the contractor's written rating and compliance evidence with the final invoice.

Frequently asked questions

Is SEER2 the same as SEER?

DOE describes a changed test procedure and rating nomenclature. Compare systems on the same rating basis.

Does one US minimum apply to every central AC installation?

DOE says regional standards depend on the type of equipment and when and where it is installed. Ask for the rule for your exact job.