

DGS HVAC FAQs

How Does DGS Prepare HVAC Systems for the Fall and Winter Seasons?

As the District's implementation agency for all District owned and managed facilities, the Department of General Services (DGS) takes proactive steps to prepare HVAC systems for colder temperatures during the winter season. This includes expanding our already established preventative maintenance efforts for inspecting, testing, and maintenance of HVAC systems across all eight wards. All HVAC systems at DGS managed buildings are inspected daily to ensure they are functioning properly.

DGS also works closely with all DC government properties to transition air conditioning (HVAC) systems from cooling to heating in preparation for the colder months. This annual process begins in the third week of October and typically lasts between 30 to 45 days.

It is important to note that larger facilities, such as government buildings, schools, and recreation centers, may take up to a day to switch from cooling to heating. Unlike residential properties, the transition at large-scale industrial-sized facilities requires complex HVAC engineering work, meaning systems cannot revert to cooling until the following season. During this transition period, temperatures may fluctuate by up to 30 degrees which can temporarily impact indoor temperature conditions.

How Many HVAC Systems Does DGS Manage?

DGS manages approximately 700 HVAC systems across District-owned and managed facilities, including schools, first responder sites, and government buildings.

What Preventative Maintenance Measures Does DGS Take for HVAC Systems?

DGS began HVAC preventative maintenance in 2021. In FY24, DGS expanded its preventative maintenance program to cover the majority of District government buildings, in addition to schools. This initiative improves the efficiency and reliability of HVAC systems, preventing costly breakdowns and extending equipment lifespan. By addressing maintenance proactively, the program reduces the risk of inefficient energy

use and lowers operating costs, while enhancing system performance. Additionally, the reduced energy consumption helps support the city's sustainability goals by contributing to a smaller carbon footprint for the District's building portfolio.

Preventative measures that DGS takes for HVAC systems include the HVAC Inspection, Testing, and Maintenance (ITM) Program with tasks such as:

- Thermostat and refrigerant checks
- Condensate drain cleaning
- Air filter replacements
- Condenser coil cleaning

These preventative measures enhance air quality, improve energy efficiency, and extend the life of DGS-maintained HVAC systems.

What Happens When the Heat Goes Out at a DGS-Managed Facility?

Heating and cooling issues are treated as high priority by DGS. More than 110 technicians are available to assess and address HVAC problems as they arise.

In the event of a heating issue, building occupants are not left in unheated areas. Contingency measures, such as portable heating solutions, are deployed to maintain target temperatures until full repairs are completed. For school-related issues, DCPS promptly notifies parents, guardians, and administrators.

It is important to note that it is rare for entire facilities to be offline. Typically, heating issues are limited to specific rooms or sections of a building.

Why Do Some Rooms Feel Hot or Cold Even When the HVAC System is Working?

Large-scale HVAC systems operate differently from residential units. Factors such as system size, airflow distribution, open windows/doors, or thermostat interference can cause temperature variations. DGS continuously monitors and adjusts HVAC systems to maintain consistent indoor temperatures across all facilities.

Why Would a HVAC System Not Function Properly?

HVAC systems can experience performance issues due to various factors, including:

- Aging systems
- System deficiencies

- Newly installed systems that require calibration, e.g. newly modernized recreation center or school facility
- External factors such as power outages
- Environmental interferences impacting thermostat controls, e.g., outside heating units in classrooms impacting system thermostat controls
- Extreme weather events, including sustained low temperatures or prolonged heatwaves
- Snow accumulation or icy conditions limiting accessibility to rooftop HVAC systems
- User error when adjusting temperature gauge
- Leaving windows or doors open

How Long Does It Take to Fix HVAC Issues?

There are various levels of HVAC repair:

- **Routine** (e.g., minor thermostat adjustments)
- **High Priority** (e.g., part replacements and moderate issues)
- **Capital Project** (e.g., boiler deficiency and system replacements) which requires a longer timeline and capital planning.

The time required to resolve HVAC issues varies based on repair complexity, system age, part availability, or capital planning. However, DGS takes immediate action to ensure adequate heating through short-term contingencies to maintain comfort for students, staff, and administrators during the repair process.

Are District Facilities at Risk of Closing Due to Heating Issues?

Facility closures due to heating deficiencies are extremely rare. DGS works diligently to ensure schools, government buildings, and first responder sites remain operational during extreme weather events.

For example, during the January 2025 snowstorm, DGS successfully maintained heating across all facilities, preventing closures. While temporary heating challenges may occur in specific sections of buildings, contingency plans are always in place to maintain a safe and comfortable environment. For school-related issues, DCPS communicates directly with stakeholders.

What Are the Recommended Temperature Ranges for DGS-Managed Buildings?

The standard temperature range for DGS-maintained facilities is 68–74° Fahrenheit following the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) indoor temperature recommendations of 68–74°F during the heating season and 72–80°F during the cooling season, with a relative humidity range of 30–60%. For example, EdSpecs for school facilities are standard within this range. During extreme cold, setpoints may be adjusted to maintain comfort within these guidelines.

How to Report a Heating Issue to DGS?

There is a structured process for reporting heating issues. At District managed and owned facilities, facility managers and trained personnel submit emergency work orders through the DGS Work Order Management System, which allows for effective tracking and expedited response times. Work orders are assigned based on urgency, and response times vary depending on the severity of the issue. For school-related concerns, staff should follow DCPS' internal escalation process. Requests made outside of this system may cause delays in service.

Work order prioritization incorporates student populations and location of deficiency (ECE, special needs classrooms, etc.)