



*When delivering the right fit for customers,*

*Contractor is*

# King

Heating and cooling represent up to 55% of a typical home's energy usage, so it is not surprising that homeowners often start there when they are looking to save energy. Where do they turn for advice? In most cases, the "Contractor is King."

That's right. While many consumers conduct preliminary research by visiting home improvement stores, surfing the Web and asking friends, Minnesota Power customer surveys and one-on-one conversations clearly show that contractors are the main source of information about what to install, what rebates and incentives are available, and how equipment should be used.

"Contractors are the final resource," said Joe Randall, co-owner, Randall Brothers Heating and Air Conditioning Inc., Cloquet, Minn. "People get tidbits of information from other sources, but we are expected to be knowledgeable and show them the right way to incorporate energy-efficient heating and cooling systems into their homes and businesses."

Randall is among a growing list of contractors who have qualified to participate in Minnesota Power's heating, cooling, and water heating program. He also achieved the high performing contractor designation, based on his commitment to energy-efficient HVAC and water heating projects that satisfy customers and work well for their homes, plus the number of units installed.

"It goes beyond installation of an energy-efficient product," said George Agriesti, a member of Minnesota Power's Energy Conservation Team.

"It is up to the contractor to make sure a product does what it promises."  
-Jeremy Carlson, Carlson Duluth Co.

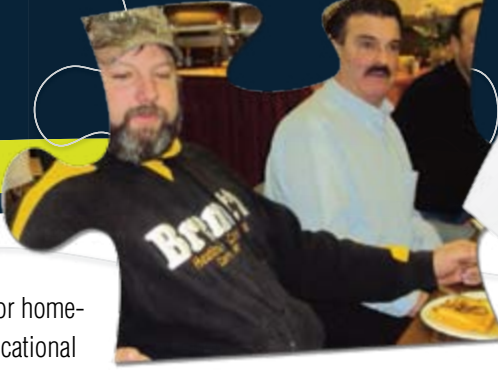
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He introduced the utility's "Contractor is King" philosophy as the basis for Minnesota Power's High Performer Contractor Network strategy at a special 2011 high performer recognition breakfast during the 21st Annual Energy Design Conference & Expo at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center (DECC). "It means ensuring the right product is delivered in the right way to the right customer, when and how they want it." Minnesota Power calls it the "right fit" for the customer, contractor and utility.

"We try to incorporate energy conservation into all of our projects; to deliver the best comfort and the most environmentally responsible systems in a cost-effective way," Randall said. "It starts with concept and design. If you design in a good high-efficiency system, educate people and connect them to available rebates and tax credits, in most cases, customers will choose that route."

"Customers primarily are driven by two things—price and comfort," said Bruce Welman, Bruce's Refrigeration Heating & Cooling, Cloquet and Duluth. "We listen to our customers so we understand their objectives and provide them with different options. One we always try to incorporate is a two-stage furnace with an electronically commutated motor (ECM) because it saves energy and money while producing more even temperatures and improving comfort."

Other popular energy-efficient options for home heating and cooling include programmable thermostats that allow people to program temperatures around their daily lifestyles, air source heat pumps that transfer energy between indoor and outdoor air, and ground source heat pumps that use the earth as a heat source in the winter and a cooling agent in the summer. Drain water heat recovery (DWHR) systems are a valuable energy-saving device for lowering water-heating costs.



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- Brent Belich, Brent's Heating & Cooling

Minnesota Power provides rebates and incentives for homeowners to choose these products and sponsors educational opportunities, such as the Energy Design Conference & Expo and recent DWHR training, to help contractors stay abreast of the latest technology.

“I have gone through several trainings and regularly attend the Energy Design Conference & Expo,” said Steve Koutsoyan, Plaunt Plumbing & Heating, Duluth. “Heating and cooling equipment is continually improving and it is good to know the latest information so I can share it with customers.”

Koutsoyan added that he regularly extols the benefits of high-efficiency furnaces with ECM motors and the rebates available through Minnesota Power.

High performing contractors agree that rebates help them persuade customers to consider higher efficiency systems, which typically have a higher upfront cost. Members of the network completed 80% of Minnesota Power's rebated HVAC projects in 2010.

“Rebates are a good incentive for people to get rid of an old, inefficient system or to install a high-efficiency system in their new home,” said Brent Belich, Brent's Heating & Cooling, LLC, Carlton, Minn. “It is a way for them to get a more efficient system at a lower incremental cost.”

Once a system is properly installed, high performing contractors help ensure customer satisfaction by providing information on proper use and maintenance so energy-saving performance meets expectations.

“We look out for the customers and want them to be happy with the system they chose,” Belich said. “At the completion of each job, we go through a checklist and make sure they know how to operate it and what maintenance is needed to ensure it operates efficiently.”

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- Steve Koutsoyan, Plaunt Plumbing & Heating

“It is up to the contractor to make sure a product does what it promises,” said Jeremy Carlson, Carlson Duluth Co. “Customers are pretty savvy about wanting energy-efficiency in their homes and businesses, but we need to be knowledgeable and provide the right products and the proper training so systems perform properly.”

The defining principle of Minnesota Power's Power of One®... *it begins with you* overall conservation strategy is to help customers understand how they use energy and make informed choices to use energy effectively and get the most for their energy dollars. As part of

its commitment to delivering valuable conservation programs and to help ensure quality installations, Minnesota Power has developed processes to build and maintain its high performer contractor network. This includes a toll-free number for contractors to request materials, identify training opportunities and requirements, and to address contractor questions about program applications. Participating contractors are provided with a program manual, updated annually, that details program specifications and provides information about requirements to participate. Minnesota Power periodically reviews its participating contractor list to verify that those included have product and program training knowledge, quality installation experience, and high customer satisfaction ratings. This is the basis for Minnesota Power's High Performer Contractor Network initiative.

“For continued program success, it is imperative that customer expectations are in alignment with actual performance as it relates to energy efficiency,” said Al Lian, HVAC program leader, Minnesota Power. “This hinges on high performing contractors committed to delivering the right fit for customers and their homes. Remember, the Contractor is King.”

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