

How to choose a heat pump installer

What the two licences a heat pump installer needs actually cover, and why the state rebate you may have read about has closed

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In Tasmania "heat pump" means two different jobs owned by two different trades: the reverse-cycle unit that heats and cools a room, and the heat pump hot water system on the wall outside. Both are sold by people who are not always licensed to install them, and both attract rebate claims that may no longer exist. What separates installers is not the brand of the box - it is who is licensed to connect it, and whether the sizing was calculated for your house or copied from the last quote.

What it should cost

A single reverse-cycle split system (roughly 2.5 to 7 kW) supplied and installed typically lands somewhere around \$1,800 to \$3,500 depending on the unit and how hard the install is; a simple back-to-back job on an existing wall sits at the low end, while a long pipe run, a second storey or a switchboard upgrade pushes it up. Ducted reverse-cycle for a whole house is a different order of money, generally \$8,000 to \$20,000 or more and sized to the house rather than the room count. A heat pump hot water system is usually about \$2,500 to \$5,000 installed before any certificate discount.

Servicing and repairs are where a cheap install catches up with you: an annual service on a split system is commonly \$150 to \$300 per unit, and a regas or compressor replacement runs to many hundreds or over a thousand. Ask for a quote that separates the unit, the labour, the electrical connection and any plumbing, and if a rebate is mentioned, ask which scheme, what it is worth and whether the scheme is still open. As at publication Tasmania's main household energy loan scheme has closed, so the only broad discount left on eligible heat pump hot water is the federal STC scheme, applied as a point-of-sale discount.

What the law requires

Air conditioning and refrigeration work in Tasmania is licensed: a technician must hold a current practitioner licence for air conditioning and refrigeration through the state's building services licensing system (the regulator formerly known as CBOS, now restructured into Building Standards Tasmania and Consumer Affairs Tasmania). Anyone who handles the refrigerant gas must separately hold a federal Refrigerant Handling Licence issued through the ARC. Those are two different credentials, and a general electrician's licence on its own does not cover refrigerant work.

The electrical connection must be done by a licensed electrician and, in most cases, signed off with a Certificate of Electrical Safety. A heat pump hot water system is also a plumbing job: it must be installed by a licensed plumber, with a Certificate of Plumbing Compliance. So a proper heat pump install can involve three licensed people - the refrigeration technician, the electrician and the plumber - and a quote that names none of them has not thought about the legal side at all.

Red flags

- Quotes a rebate that has closed, or will not name the scheme and its current value.
- Cannot produce a refrigeration and air conditioning licence or an ARC gas licence.
- Sizes the system by room count or by whatever is on special, not by a heat-load calculation.
- Says the electrical connection is "just plug-in" or will be done by an unlicensed person.
- Offers to skip the Certificate of Electrical Safety or the plumbing compliance certificate.
- Pressures you to sign before the price changes tomorrow.

What good looks like

- Names the specific credential for each part of the job - refrigeration, electrical, plumbing.
- Shows a heat-load calculation that uses your house's insulation, glazing and orientation.
- Puts any rebate on its own line with the scheme's actual name.
- Explains why heat pump hot water suits, or does not suit, your situation rather than just selling it.
- Has a local service presence so the five-year repair call actually happens.

What to ask

- "What licence do you hold for the refrigeration and air conditioning work, and what is the number?"
- "Will you show me the ARC refrigerant handling licence for whoever does the gas work?"
- "Who does the electrical connection, and will I get a Certificate of Electrical Safety?"
- "For hot water, who is the licensed plumber, and will I get a Certificate of Plumbing Compliance?"
- "How did you size this system - what heat load did you calculate for my house?"
- "Is there any rebate or certificate in this quote, what is it worth, and is the scheme still open?"
- "What is the warranty on parts and on labour, and who honours it in five years?"

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