

# Water Heaters...

## My Experience Going Tankless

– by Day Atkins

Sixteen. That's the number of bottles of "haircare products" in my shower. I have managed pretty well for many years with the mini-bottle of shampoo liberated from occasional hotel stays. That has worked fine without occupying much real estate in my shower.

The 16 bottles of shampoo, as it turns out, are merely overflow from the showers of my three teenage daughters who have raised bathing to a new art. There was never enough hot water to practice their art to the fullest, so when our water heater began leaking, we began looking at options.

Having just contracted with a home energy specialist to examine our house for energy efficiency, I asked the contractor, "Are we a candidate for a tankless water heater?" He was discouraging, citing the fact that they are "very expensive to install" and advising that we would not save any money. Normally, that would have been discouraging, but

we had had experience with an early version of a tankless water heater, a small unit in a small cabin, and it had used little natural gas. Our bill was always nominal.

Despite the general contractor's discouragement, I persisted, asking that he get a quote from a plumbing contractor. The quote came in at \$800 to replace with a traditional electric water heater. We were not a candidate for a heat pump water heater, but the third option, the tankless heater, came in at about \$3,000, a significant difference.

Our contractor's discouraging words would likely have persuaded us to replace the old water heater with a new tank heater and been satisfied had it not been for our experience with the tankless model; therefore, our positive experience and the prospect of greater efficiency moved us to go the tankless route.

We selected a Navien Model because it has good consumer reviews, a .97 Energy Factor, an amazing 15-year warranty, a stainless steel heat exchanger, a condensing unit with features like the option of setting it up as a recirc pump so hot water is instantaneously available at the point of use, and a buffer tank to eliminate what the industry refers to as a "cold water sandwich."

Andrew Sloan of Sloan Plumbing showed up for the install and was immediately concerned. The location for direct venting of the heater to the outside had multiple problems. The vent appeared to be too close to a window as well as near the electrical panel and gas meter. He quickly identified other venting options, but none were feasible.



*Technician from Sloan Plumbing, Greensboro, NC working on Navien tankless installation*

Returning to option 1, direct venting to the outside, Sloan checked his code book and, after several phone calls to the plumbing inspector, determined that indeed the venting could be accomplished in the desired location. The remainder of the installation went smoothly, and downtime on the hot water was less than one hour.

We now have more hot water, an endless supply, which makes the troops happy. We'll review the real-world ROI in a later article, but the initial "take-away" is that the industry probably could do a better job of promoting the benefits of tankless to consumers as well as to contractors. There is a substantial upfront cost to convert from electric to gas tankless and sometimes, as in our case, the retrofit can be less than straightforward. However, the final result of providing the homeowner an endless supply of hot water with a very energy-efficient unit is an attractive marketable option which plumbing contractors should promote. ■



*Navien NPE-240A Condensing Tankless Water Heater*