



**Birmingham Heating & Air Conditioning**

*Heating and cooling in the heart of Shelby County.*

FIELD GUIDE · BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

# 10 Questions to Ask Before Hiring an HVAC Contractor in Alabama

*Most homeowners get burned because they didn't ask the right questions up front. Here are the ten that separate real contractors from the rest.*

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**Who this is for:** Any homeowner about to spend more than \$1,000 on HVAC work in Alabama. Especially first-time replacement buyers.

**What's inside:** The 10 questions in order, what each correct answer looks like, the Alabama license lookup link, how to verify insurance, and the three red flags that should end the conversation immediately.

**Service area:** Shelby County, Alabama — Helena, Chelsea, Calera, Pelham, Alabaster, Hoover

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## Why This List Exists

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In a single year, the Alabama Board of Heating & Air Conditioning Contractors fields hundreds of complaints. Most are preventable. Most could have been killed at the first phone call if the homeowner had asked the right questions. This list is built from those complaint patterns.

## Question 1 — What's Your Alabama HVAC License Number?

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Every contractor doing HVAC work over \$50,000 must be licensed by the Alabama Board of Heating & Air Conditioning Contractors. Many residential jobs are below that threshold but reputable contractors hold the license anyway as a quality signal.

- Right answer: "License #HVCR-XXXXX" — a specific number, freely given
- Wrong answer: "We don't need one for this job" — sometimes technically true, always a yellow flag
- Verify at [hvacboard.alabama.gov](http://hvacboard.alabama.gov) license search

## Question 2 — Are You EPA Section 608 Certified?

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Anyone handling refrigerant must hold EPA Section 608 certification. Every. Single. Tech.

- Right answer: "All our techs are 608 certified — Universal class"
- Wrong answer: any hesitation, or "the supervisor is"
- A non-certified tech handling refrigerant is a federal violation and means your warranty is void

## Question 3 — Do You Carry Liability Insurance and Workers' Comp?

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If a technician falls off your roof and the contractor doesn't carry workers' comp, you can be liable. Ask for the certificate of insurance.

- Right answer: "Yes. I'll email you the certificate before we start"
- Wrong answer: "Yes" with no documentation. Get it in writing
- Minimum acceptable: \$1M general liability, current workers' comp policy

## Question 4 — Who Actually Does the Work?

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Many contractors sell you on a senior tech and send the apprentice.

- Right answer: "Our lead tech [Name] will be on the job; here's his certification"
- Wrong answer: "Our team" or "whoever's available"
- For a new install: ask if the technician installing your specific system has done that exact brand/model before

## Question 5 — What's the Written Warranty?

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Verbal warranties don't exist. Written warranties have specifics.

- Equipment parts: typically 10 years from manufacturer (registered)
- Compressor: often 10-12 years (registered)
- Labor: 1 year minimum from contractor; 2-3 years is better; 10 years extended is available on premium installations
- Right answer: a single page that lists each component, each term, what's covered, what isn't
- Wrong answer: "Standard manufacturer warranty" with no paper

## Question 6 — Will You Pull a Mechanical Permit?

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Most Birmingham municipalities require a mechanical permit for full-system replacement. Skipping it might save 2-3 days but voids many manufacturer warranties and invalidates the work for resale.

- Right answer: "Yes, we pull it; we include permit fees in the estimate"
- Wrong answer: "We don't need one" — usually wrong, sometimes intentionally
- Verify with your municipality if unsure

## Question 7 — Will You Run a Manual J Load Calc?

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See AC Sizing Cheat Sheet. The short version: yes is the right answer; "we go by square footage" is the wrong answer.

## Question 8 — How Do You Handle Refrigerant Disposal?

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If you're replacing an R-22 unit, the old refrigerant must be recovered (federal law). Asking this question tells you whether they cut corners.

- Right answer: "We recover refrigerant onto a tank for proper disposal. Required by EPA"
- Wrong answer: any vagueness
- A contractor who skips this is breaking federal law

## Question 9 — What's the Payment Schedule?

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No reputable contractor asks for the full amount up front.

- Reasonable: deposit (10-30%) on signing, balance on completion
- Acceptable: equipment cost up front, labor on completion
- Unacceptable: 100% up front, or "cash only"

## **Question 10 — Can I Talk to Three Recent Customers?**

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A real contractor has a list of references they can hand you. Recent. Local. Reachable.

- Right answer: 3 phone numbers within an hour, all in Shelby/Jefferson County
- Wrong answer: vague references, all out of state, or "you can read our reviews online"
- Call them. Ask about timeline, follow-through, surprise charges

## **The Three Red Flags That End the Conversation**

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If you see ANY of these, stop. Get another quote.

- High-pressure pitch with a "today-only" price
- Cash-only or check-only with no credit card option
- Refusal to put anything in writing

# About Birmingham Heating & Air Conditioning

**Birmingham Heating & Air Conditioning** — Heating and cooling in the heart of Shelby County.

Shelby County, Alabama — Helena, Chelsea, Calera, Pelham, Alabaster, Hoover

This guide was written by working HVAC techs, not marketing teams. Direct, honest, practical. Real Alabama numbers, real local context, no guarantees we can't back up.

If something in here saved you a service call — or saved you from a bad one — share it with a neighbor. That's the whole point.

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*Licensed Alabama HVAC contractor. Written estimates. No surprise bills.*