

Q & A WITH TAKAGI

Takagi Vice President Ted Kwak discusses the new generation of tankless technology

In a recent conversation, Ted Kwak, vice president of Takagi Industrial Company USA Inc., the nation's best-selling manufacturer of tankless water heaters, talked about the growing popularity of tankless models and how they can even become a valuable part of a contractor's marketing efforts.

Q: What do you think has caused tankless water heaters to enjoy such a huge rise in popularity during the past few years?

A: This rise in popularity goes beyond the obvious answers that tankless water heaters take up less space, provide virtually limitless supplies of hot water (more than 250 gallons an hour for some units), have little need of repair and last a lot longer than conventional water heaters. The fact that tankless models use far less energy than conventional units has become increasingly important as more and more Americans become concerned about energy consumption and energy costs. Savings on utility bills average above 25%, while new compliance regulations are currently driving up the cost of conventional tank water heaters. Consumers who choose tankless also can feel good about doing their part to conserve our energy resources.

Q: Are there certain applications for which tankless water heaters are better suited than others?

A: Tankless technology applies to just about any residential, commercial or industrial structure because the units can be stand-alone or can be combined into a major system. With tankless models sized from as little as 30 pounds and 2.2 cubic feet, they certainly are ideal for condominiums or other compactly designed structures where garage and storage space are at a premium. They also are perfect in a hotel, high-rise office or apartment building, where up to 20 tankless units can be linked by a single control system to meet all of the building's hot water requirements. If one unit becomes defective, the tankless grouping will continue to provide hot water, unlike the failure of a conventional boiler, which brings the flow of hot water to a standstill. Another advantage for commercial applications is one-person installation, compared with the crew and equipment needed to install a boiler.

Q: What are some of the more unusual tankless water heater applications you have seen?

A: We know of one consumer who installed a tankless-powered hydronic heating system within his sidewalk for melting snow in the winter. Another, more common application of hydronic heating, which has been in use for more than a century in other parts of the world, is providing residential space heating by running hot water through plastic tubes embedded in a cement floor. While these systems have been powered by various heat sources throughout their history, a tankless water heater is the obvious heat source for today because of its minimal space and energy requirements and low operational costs.

Q: If tankless units have little need of repair and last so much longer than conventional water heaters, wouldn't plumbing contractors be cutting into future business by promoting tankless water heaters to their customers?

A: Maybe in the shortsighted view, but the big picture tells a different story. Tankless water heater technology represents a major breakthrough in reducing energy consumption, and there's no doubt that the technology is here to stay for that reason alone. Additionally, many consumers want to be on the cutting edge of new technologies and are embracing tankless water heaters wholeheartedly. Then they tell their friends, who also tell their friends who get the idea. So, contractors who add tankless water heaters to their available products and become proficient in the easy installation techniques of tankless units should actually be able to expand their business base by carrying a wider range of products.