

Mr. Burch Cleaners



Natural gas equipment delivers loads of clean laundry and happy customers

Mr. Burch Cleaners installs new high efficiency natural gas water heater and boiler

When businesses look for ways to save energy, many of the solutions often come with sacrifices. Management wants to use energy wisely but also wants to avoid major changes in business processes or operating hours.

Birmingham's Mr. Burch Cleaners is just one of many local companies interested in reducing energy costs. Mr. Burch has been able to do just that thanks to a new clean-burning natural gas boiler and natural gas water heater.

When the company initially sought help through an energy audit at its Green Springs Highway location, the conversation soon turned to the equipment at the main Downtown location. The Downtown site is where the company performs all the dry cleaning that is brought in from its seven satellite drop-off

outlets that are scattered around Birmingham.

The first piece of equipment they evaluated was the water heater. The existing water heater was about 10 years old. It was able to provide adequate hot water for the day's first load of washing. However, as the day went on, the water heater was never able to recover to the temperature needed for optimum cleaning.

"It is difficult to ensure that the clothes are being cleaned properly if your water heater can't keep up with demand," said Wayne Burch, owner of Mr. Burch Cleaners. "I need to know that my customers are getting the cleaning they expect and deserve from us."

Alagasco suggested replacing the existing water heater with a new

A.O. Smith Cyclone Xi BTH 150. The 150,000 BTU condensing water heater runs with 96 percent efficiency and stores 100 gallons of hot water.

Laundry detergents work best in warmer water temperatures, so having consistently high water temperatures all day long removes more dirt and grime. Mr. Burch launders about 500 shirts per week brought in by customers and runs a tuxedo rental division that includes another 700 white shirts. The consistent water temperature leads to the brightest white shirts in town and loads of happy customers.

Next on the list was the boiler. Mr. Burch's existing natural gas boiler ran on 65 horsepower with 58 percent efficiency. The local power company presented Mr. Burch an alternative that called for the installa-



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tion of an electric boiler in addition to the existing natural gas boiler. The intent was that Mr. Burch could use the electric boiler during certain business hours and then switch to natural gas at other times.

However, fuel switching wasn’t the ideal solution at Mr. Burch. A hallmark of their dry cleaning business is the convenience of next-day service. Being tied to different energy sources at different times of the day would have forced Mr. Burch to make changes to business processes and potentially jeopardize their longstanding next-day service policy. That was something that just wasn’t up for debate.

Selecting an electric boiler would have also meant an expansion to the current boiler room as well as the on-going maintenance of both the electric and the natural gas boiler.

Instead, Alagasco representatives took the time to consider those business requirements and proposed a 40 horsepower Cleaver-Brooks Clearfire H natural gas boiler. While it runs on lower horsepower than the existing boiler, this new model boasts an 85 percent efficiency rating – the most effective natural gas steam boiler on the market today.

“There is no doubt that natural gas is the best fuel for the dry cleaning business,” Burch said. “This is by far the best boiler we’ve ever had.”

The new boiler provides ample steam at consistent pressure for the pressing machines. The steam is not as “wet,” so the clothes dry better as well.

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Within the first six months of operation of both the new water heater and the new boiler, energy usage has decreased an average of 30 percent each month. The new equipment reduced carbon emissions by 29 percent.

Alagasco representatives took the time to learn the laundry and dry cleaning business in order to suggest equipment options that would serve Mr. Burch well.

“Alagasco presented us a range of solutions so that we could make the decision with which we were most comfortable,” said Barbara McColium, Mr. Burch office manager. “The representatives were so patient with us as we researched what would best meet our needs.”

Natural gas is an environmentally friendly choice businesses can make today. It is efficient, reliable and clean burning. Choosing natural gas means your business can save energy, reduce emissions and protect the environment. Contact Alagasco today so you can see how well suited natural gas is for your business.