TORONTO DUCTWORK

Sheet Metal Fabrication

Custom sheet metal duct fabrication, transitions, plenums, register boots, and specialty fittings for residential HVAC systems

24 Expert Answers from Duct IQ

torontoductwork.com/construction-brain

Table of Contents

1. Does exposed spiral duct suit a Toronto basement?
2. How do Toronto sheet metal shops handle ductwork fabrication for heritage building restorations?
3. What sheet metal thickness is required for underground ductwork in a Toronto home slab?
4. Can I use copper sheet metal for decorative ductwork in a Toronto heritage home kitchen?
5. What is the difference between a pressed elbow and a fabricated elbow in Toronto sheet metal ductwork?
6. What gauge of sheet metal should be used for a high-static-pressure Toronto commercial duct system?
7. What is the difference between single-wall and double-wall sheet metal ductwork in the GTA?
8. What is the proper way to join round spiral duct sections with a sheet metal sleeve in a GTA install?
9. How do Toronto contractors prevent oil-canning on large flat sheet metal duct panels?
10. What type of sheet metal sealant is approved for use in Toronto residential duct fabrication?
11. Can perforated sheet metal ductwork be used as a supply diffuser in a Toronto commercial fit-out?
12. Can sheet metal ductwork be recycled when replaced in a Toronto home?
13. What gauge sheet metal is used for residential ductwork in the GTA?
14. What is the difference between galvanized steel and stainless steel ductwork for Toronto homes?
15. How are sheet metal duct fittings fabricated for custom Toronto home HVAC systems?
16. What is the lifespan of galvanized sheet metal ductwork in a Toronto home?
17. Can sheet metal ductwork rust in a damp Toronto basement?
18. What are the advantages of spiral duct over rectangular sheet metal in Toronto homes?
19. How do sheet metal contractors join duct sections in a Toronto residential installation?
20. What type of fasteners and connectors are used for sheet metal ductwork in the GTA?
21. Can I paint exposed sheet metal ductwork in my Toronto home or loft?
22. What is the difference between snap-lock and Pittsburgh seam ductwork used in Toronto?
23. Is phenolic duct board used in Toronto residential applications?

24. What is the correct way to transition from round to rectangular ductwork in the GTA?

Q1

Does exposed spiral duct suit a Toronto basement?

Exposed spiral duct is an excellent choice for a Toronto basement renovation — it looks sharp, performs well, and suits the GTA climate better than most alternatives.

Spiral round duct (also called spiral seam duct) is factory-fabricated steel duct with a continuous spiral seam running its length. Unlike snap-lock round duct or rectangular sheet metal assembled on-site, spiral duct is rigid, dimensionally consistent, and has fewer seams where air can leak. That combination of aesthetics and performance is why it has become the go-to choice for basement renovations with an open, industrial, or modern look across Toronto neighbourhoods like Leslieville, the Junction, and Danforth Village, where exposed mechanical systems are increasingly popular design features.

Why Spiral Duct Works Well in GTA Basements

Toronto's climate creates real challenges for duct systems, and spiral duct handles them better than most options. The fewer seams compared to rectangular duct mean less air leakage — a critical advantage given that the average GTA home loses 20-30% of conditioned air through duct leaks before it reaches living spaces. Spiral duct's smooth interior also creates less friction than flex duct, meaning your furnace works less hard to push air through the system. In a Toronto basement where the duct system is often the main trunk serving the entire house, that efficiency matters.

Condensation is the other major consideration. In summer, cold supply air (typically 12-15°C) running through a basement at ambient temperature can cause surface condensation on uninsulated duct. If you are leaving spiral duct exposed for aesthetics, you need to decide upfront whether to insulate it. In a conditioned basement (one that is heated and cooled), condensation risk is lower because the ambient temperature stays closer to the supply air temperature. In an unconditioned or partially conditioned basement, exposed uninsulated spiral duct will sweat in July and August — dripping onto your finished floor or ceiling below. The solution is either to insulate the duct (which covers the aesthetic) or to ensure the basement is properly conditioned and dehumidified.

Practical Considerations for Your Project

Sizing and design matter enormously with exposed duct because you cannot easily hide a mistake behind drywall. Spiral duct for a main trunk typically runs 10-inch, 12-inch, or 14-inch diameter depending on your system's airflow requirements — these numbers come from a proper Manual D duct design, not guesswork. Branch runs to individual rooms are typically 6-inch or 8-inch round, transitioning to rectangular register boots at the wall or ceiling. Getting the sizing right the first time is essential.

Sealing should be done with duct mastic at all joints and connections, even on spiral duct. The spiral seam itself is tight, but every fitting, branch takeoff, and register boot connection needs to be mastic-sealed and taped with UL 181-rated foil tape. Never use grey cloth duct tape — it fails within a few years in Toronto's temperature swings.

Cost for spiral duct installed in a GTA basement runs approximately **$10-$25 per linear foot** for the main trunk, with branch runs and fittings adding to the total. A complete basement duct system using spiral trunk duct with properly sized branches typically runs **$3,000-$8,000** depending on basement size, layout complexity, and how many supply and return registers are required. That is somewhat higher than a standard rectangular duct system, but the aesthetic value and performance justify the premium for most homeowners doing a finished basement renovation.

If your project involves significant duct modification or a new system, a building permit from the City of Toronto may be required — confirm with the Building Division before starting.

Toronto Ductwork can match you with a local sheet metal contractor experienced in exposed spiral duct installations. Browse ductwork and HVAC professionals through the Toronto Construction Network directory at **torontoconstructionnetwork.com/directory?trade=hvac**.

Q2

How do Toronto sheet metal shops handle ductwork fabrication for heritage building restorations?

Heritage ductwork fabrication in Toronto requires custom sheet metal work that balances modern mechanical performance with the preservation constraints of historic buildings — it's one of the most technically demanding specialties in the GTA sheet metal trade.

Toronto has a significant stock of heritage-designated properties, from Victorian-era homes in Cabbagetown and Rosedale to early 20th-century commercial buildings in the Distillery District and King-Spadina. When these buildings need updated ventilation or HVAC distribution, standard off-the-shelf duct components rarely fit the bill. Heritage restorations demand fabrication that works within existing structural bays, plaster ceiling depths, and masonry wall cavities that were never designed to accommodate mechanical systems.

Custom Fabrication Over Standard Components

GTA sheet metal shops serving heritage projects typically operate with full fabrication capabilities — plasma cutters, press brakes, Pittsburgh lock formers, and snap-lock machines — that allow them to produce non-standard duct profiles on demand. Where a typical residential job uses standard 6-inch or 8-inch round branch ducts and

rectangular trunk lines in common sizes, a heritage project might require oval ducts in unusual dimensions (say, 14 inches by 4 inches) to fit within a shallow floor cavity between original hardwood flooring and a plaster ceiling below. Oval duct is particularly valuable in heritage work because it delivers the same cross-sectional area as round duct while fitting into much shallower spaces.

Rectangular duct fabricated to precise custom dimensions is the other workhorse of heritage restoration. A skilled shop can produce rectangular duct in virtually any dimension, allowing contractors to thread supply runs through wall cavities, under window seats, or along baseboards in ways that preserve original millwork and plaster. The fabrication drawings for a heritage project are far more detailed than standard residential work — every fitting, transition, and elbow is custom-dimensioned based on site measurements rather than catalogue selections.

Working Around Heritage Constraints

The core challenge is routing ductwork through a building that was designed without any mechanical distribution in mind. Pre-war Toronto homes and heritage commercial buildings have load-bearing masonry walls, original plaster on wood lath (which cannot be easily patched to match), ornate cornices and ceiling medallions, and floor structures that cannot be notched or drilled without structural review. This means ductwork routes must be planned around the building rather than through it.

Concealment strategies used by experienced GTA sheet metal shops on heritage projects include routing ducts inside built-up baseboards (a 6-inch-tall baseboard can conceal a 4-inch by 3-inch duct run), using existing chimney flues that are no longer active as duct chases (with proper lining and fire safety review), running supply ducts inside custom millwork cabinets or window seats, and using high-sidewall registers instead of floor or ceiling registers to avoid penetrating original flooring or plaster ceilings.

Exposed spiral duct has become an accepted aesthetic solution in heritage commercial restorations — the Distillery District is full of examples where exposed galvanized or black-painted spiral duct is treated as an honest expression of the building's adaptive reuse rather than hidden infrastructure. This approach works well in industrial heritage buildings but is generally not appropriate for residential heritage designations where the goal is to preserve the original domestic character.

Sealing, Insulation, and Condensation in Heritage Buildings

Heritage buildings present unique condensation challenges. Original masonry walls and plaster ceilings have very different thermal properties than modern construction — they are often cold to the touch in winter and can cause condensation on any duct surface running near the exterior envelope. **R-8 duct wrap minimum** is essential for any supply duct running near exterior walls or in unheated attic spaces, and the vapour barrier on the insulation must face outward to prevent moisture from migrating into the insulation and onto the duct surface.

Sealing heritage ductwork is also more demanding because the duct joints are often in inaccessible locations once concealed within millwork or wall cavities. This makes **Aeroseal duct sealing** — which seals from the inside after installation — particularly valuable for heritage projects. At $1,500-$3,500 for a typical home, it is worth specifying for any heritage project where post-installation access to duct joints is limited.

Ontario Building Code and Heritage Designation

Heritage-designated properties in Toronto are subject to both the Ontario Building Code and the Ontario Heritage Act, administered through the City of Toronto's Heritage Preservation Services. Any mechanical work that involves penetrating exterior walls, altering rooflines, or modifying designated heritage elements requires heritage permit approval in addition to the standard OBC mechanical permit. This adds time to the project — heritage permit reviews can take 4-12 weeks — and may require a heritage consultant's report supporting the proposed mechanical approach.

Make-up air requirements still apply regardless of heritage designation. If a kitchen exhaust system exceeding 75 litres per second is installed, a make-up air system is required under OBC Part 6, and the make-up air intake must be located and concealed in a way that satisfies the heritage permit conditions.

Practical Guidance for Heritage Homeowners

If you own a heritage-designated property in Toronto and are planning a ductwork or ventilation project, start by confirming whether your property has a heritage designation (check the City of Toronto's Heritage Register) and what elements are protected. Engage a sheet metal contractor with documented heritage project experience — ask to see photos of previous heritage installations and request references from heritage property owners specifically. The fabrication drawings should be done before any walls are opened, and the duct routes should be reviewed by your heritage consultant before work begins.

Budget significantly more than a standard residential duct project. Heritage ductwork fabrication and installation typically runs **50-150% higher than standard residential work** due to custom fabrication time, careful installation to avoid damaging original finishes, and the slower pace required when working around irreplaceable heritage materials.

Toronto Ductwork can connect you with sheet metal contractors experienced in heritage and restoration projects through the Toronto Construction Network — browse the directory at torontoconstructionnetwork.com/directory?trade=hvac or get matched directly for a free estimate on your heritage project.

Q3

What sheet metal thickness is required for underground ductwork in a Toronto home slab?

For underground ductwork embedded in or below a concrete slab in a Toronto home, galvanized steel is not the right material at all — and this is one of the most critical material decisions in residential ductwork. Steel duct, regardless of gauge, will corrode and fail when buried in or under concrete due to moisture, alkaline concrete chemistry, and the complete absence of any ability to inspect or repair it once the slab is poured.

The Right Material for Below-Slab Ductwork

The Ontario Building Code (Part 6 — Mechanical) and standard industry practice for residential slab construction require **non-metallic duct systems** for any ductwork embedded in or running beneath a concrete slab. The two accepted approaches are:

Rigid PVC or HDPE duct systems specifically rated for underground HVAC use. These are smooth-bore, watertight, and chemically inert — they won't corrode, rust, or degrade from contact with concrete, soil moisture, or radon-bearing ground gases. The interior must be smooth to maintain acceptable friction rates for airflow. Fittings must be solvent-welded or gasketed to prevent soil gas infiltration into the duct system and, ultimately, into your living space.

Concrete-encased metal duct with protective coating is occasionally used but is generally discouraged in modern GTA residential construction. If a contractor proposes galvanized steel below-slab, ask specifically what corrosion protection system they are using, how it is applied, and what the warranty is. In most cases, a non-metallic system is the better long-term choice.

Sizing and Airflow Considerations

Below-slab duct systems in Toronto homes are most commonly used for **slab-on-grade bungalows and additions** in areas like Scarborough, Etobicoke, and Mississauga where there is no basement. The duct runs are typically short — from a central furnace location to perimeter floor registers. Because these ducts cannot be accessed after the slab is poured, sizing must be done correctly the first time using **Manual D duct design calculations**. There is no opportunity to add a damper, patch a joint, or reroute a branch once concrete covers the system.

Minimum duct sizing for below-slab runs should account for the fact that smooth-bore PVC has slightly different friction characteristics than galvanized steel. Your contractor should be calculating **static pressure drop per 100 feet of equivalent length**, accounting for all fittings, and ensuring the system delivers the required CFM to each register without exceeding the furnace or air handler's available static pressure.

GTA-Specific Concerns

Toronto's clay-heavy soil and high water table in many neighbourhoods (particularly near ravines, the Don Valley, and lakefront communities) create significant moisture pressure against below-slab duct systems. Any joint that is not perfectly sealed becomes an entry point for soil moisture and potentially radon gas — both serious indoor air quality concerns. **All joints must be solvent-welded and the entire system pressure-tested before the slab is poured.** Once concrete is placed, you have no second chances.

The transition from below-slab duct to above-slab sheet metal is a critical detail. The transition fitting must be properly flashed and sealed where it penetrates the slab surface to prevent moisture wicking up into the above-slab ductwork.

This is not a DIY project under any circumstances. Below-slab ductwork requires a building permit from the City of Toronto or your local municipality, a mechanical inspection before the slab is poured, and installation by an experienced sheet metal or HVAC contractor familiar with below-grade duct systems. The inspection happens before concrete placement — if you miss it, the municipality can require you to break out the slab.

Get matched with a ductwork contractor experienced in slab construction through the Toronto Construction Network at **torontoconstructionnetwork.com/directory?trade=hvac** — this is a specialized application where contractor experience with below-grade systems matters enormously.

Q4

Can I use copper sheet metal for decorative ductwork in a Toronto heritage home kitchen?

Copper sheet metal can absolutely be used for decorative ductwork in a heritage home kitchen — it's a beautiful, historically appropriate material choice — but there are important practical, code, and installation considerations specific to Toronto that you need to understand before committing to it.

Copper has genuine historical precedent in Victorian and Edwardian-era Toronto homes (think pre-1930 properties in Rosedale, Cabbagetown, Annex, and Parkdale), where copper and tin were common roofing, flashing, and decorative metalwork materials. Using copper for an exposed range hood surround, a decorative duct chase, or a visible trunk line in a heritage kitchen is architecturally sympathetic and can be stunning. That said, copper is almost never used for the functional duct interior in modern residential installations — it's primarily a cladding or decorative surround over a code-compliant galvanized steel or aluminum duct system underneath.

The practical reality of copper ductwork in a kitchen environment is that grease-laden exhaust air, heat, and moisture will patina copper quickly — within months in an active kitchen. This is either a feature or a problem depending on your aesthetic goals. If you want the bright, shiny penny look, you'll need to seal the copper with a clear lacquer rated for heat exposure, which requires periodic reapplication. If you prefer the aged verdigris patina, unsealed copper develops beautifully over time and requires minimal maintenance. Either way, copper is not structurally ideal for the interior of a kitchen exhaust duct because grease accumulation on any rough or patinated surface creates a fire hazard — which is why the actual exhaust duct interior must be smooth, non-porous, and cleanable, meeting Ontario Building Code requirements for grease duct construction.

From an OBC and fire code standpoint, kitchen exhaust ducts handling grease-laden air must be constructed of a minimum 16-gauge (1.6 mm) steel or 18-gauge (1.2 mm) stainless steel with all joints continuously welded — not just mechanically fastened and sealed. This is a fire safety requirement, not a suggestion. Copper does not meet this specification for the grease duct itself. The practical approach used by skilled sheet metal fabricators in Toronto is to build the code-compliant steel grease duct as the functional core, then clad the exterior with formed copper panels as a decorative surround. This gives you the heritage aesthetic without compromising fire safety or code compliance.

Cost context for a copper-clad kitchen exhaust system in the GTA: expect to pay a significant premium over a standard stainless or painted steel hood installation. Custom copper sheet metal fabrication runs roughly $80–$150 per square foot of formed and finished copper cladding, plus the underlying steel duct system ($500–$2,500 depending on run length and whether it exits through the wall or roof). A complete custom copper range hood surround with proper exhaust ductwork in a Toronto heritage kitchen typically runs $4,000–$12,000 depending on

size, complexity, and the fabricator's skill level. This is bespoke sheet metal work — not every ductwork contractor does it well.

For a heritage property in Toronto, also check with the City of Toronto's Heritage Preservation Services if your home is on the Heritage Register or within a Heritage Conservation District (many Annex, Cabbagetown, and Rosedale properties are). Exterior duct terminations visible from the street may require heritage approval, particularly the style and placement of the exhaust cap on the building facade.

You'll want a sheet metal contractor with custom fabrication experience — someone who works with an in-house or partnered sheet metal shop capable of forming, soldering, and finishing copper. This is a specialty skill set beyond standard HVAC ductwork installation.

Toronto Ductwork can connect you with contractors experienced in custom and heritage kitchen ventilation projects. Browse fabricators and HVAC contractors through the Toronto Construction Network directory at **torontoconstructionnetwork.com/directory?trade=hvac** — or reach out and we'll match you with the right professional for your project.

Q5

What is the difference between a pressed elbow and a fabricated elbow in Toronto sheet metal ductwork?

Pressed elbows are machine-formed from a single piece of metal using hydraulic presses, while fabricated elbows are hand-built by sheet metal workers using multiple pieces joined together. Both serve the same function — changing airflow direction in duct systems — but they differ significantly in construction method, cost, performance, and application.

Pressed elbows are manufactured using specialized hydraulic presses that form the curved shape from a single flat sheet of galvanized steel. The metal is placed in a die and pressed into the elbow shape in one operation. This creates a smooth, seamless curve with consistent wall thickness throughout. The interior surface has no joints or seams that could create turbulence or air leakage. Pressed elbows are available in standard angles (typically 90 degrees and 45 degrees) and common duct sizes, making them readily available from sheet metal supply houses across the GTA.

Fabricated elbows are custom-built by skilled sheet metal workers using traditional hand tools and techniques. The worker cuts multiple pieces of galvanized steel — typically 3-5 sections for a 90-degree elbow — and joins them using Pittsburgh seams, drive slips, or other mechanical connections. Each joint is then sealed with duct

mastic or UL 181 foil tape. This process requires significant skill and time but allows for custom angles, non-standard sizes, and complex geometries that pressed elbows cannot accommodate.

Performance differences are significant in GTA ductwork applications. Pressed elbows have superior airflow characteristics because the smooth, seamless interior creates less friction loss and turbulence. This translates to better system efficiency and quieter operation — important considerations in Toronto's compact housing where ductwork often runs close to living spaces. Fabricated elbows, while functional, create more pressure drop due to the internal seams and potential for less-perfect curves, especially when hand-formed quickly on job sites.

Cost considerations vary depending on the specific application. Pressed elbows typically cost $25-$60 each in standard sizes, while fabricated elbows require 1-3 hours of skilled labour at $80-$120 per hour, making them $100-$400 each depending on complexity. However, pressed elbows are only available in standard configurations. When your GTA home renovation requires a 67-degree elbow to navigate around a beam, or an oval elbow to fit in a tight ceiling space, fabrication is the only option.

When pressed elbows are preferred: Standard residential ductwork installations, trunk line connections, and anywhere airflow efficiency matters most. Most quality ductwork contractors in the GTA use pressed elbows for main runs and standard connections because they install faster, perform better, and create fewer potential leak points.

When fabricated elbows are necessary: Custom angles for tight spaces, non-standard duct sizes, oval or rectangular transitions, and complex geometries common in Toronto's older homes where ductwork must navigate around structural elements, plumbing, and electrical systems that weren't designed with HVAC in mind.

For your GTA ductwork project, discuss with your contractor whether pressed or fabricated fittings make sense for each application. Quality installations typically use pressed elbows wherever possible for performance and cost efficiency, with fabricated pieces only where custom geometry is required.

Need help finding a ductwork contractor experienced with both pressed and fabricated fittings? Toronto Ductwork can match you with local sheet metal professionals through the Toronto Construction Network.

Q6

What gauge of sheet metal should be used for a high-static-pressure Toronto commercial duct system?

Commercial ductwork in high-static-pressure systems typically requires 20-gauge galvanized steel for main trunk lines and 22-gauge for branch runs, though specific gauge requirements depend on duct size, static

pressure ratings, and structural loading.

For Toronto commercial applications, **20-gauge galvanized steel** is the standard for trunk ducts and main supply lines in high-static-pressure systems (above 2 inches water column static pressure). This provides the structural integrity needed to resist collapse under negative pressure and expansion under positive pressure. **22-gauge steel** is acceptable for smaller branch ducts (under 14 inches in diameter) and lower-pressure zones, while **18-gauge steel** may be required for very large trunk ducts or systems operating above 4 inches static pressure.

High-static-pressure systems are common in Toronto commercial buildings due to long duct runs, multiple floors, extensive filtration, and energy recovery ventilation requirements. Office towers, hospitals, schools, and manufacturing facilities often operate at 3-6 inches static pressure compared to 0.5-1.5 inches in residential systems. The higher pressures require heavier gauge metal to prevent duct collapse, oil-canning (flexing in and out), and joint failure.

Duct reinforcement becomes critical in commercial high-pressure applications. Rectangular ducts over 24 inches wide require cross-breaking (forming ridges) or angle iron reinforcement regardless of gauge. Round spiral duct is often preferred for commercial trunk lines because the spiral seam and round profile provide superior structural strength compared to rectangular snap-lock duct. **Spiral duct in 20-gauge can handle higher pressures than rectangular duct of the same gauge.**

Joint sealing in high-pressure systems must use professional-grade materials. All joints require mechanical fastening (screws or rivets) plus UL 181-rated tape or duct mastic. High static pressure will find and exploit any weak seals, causing significant energy loss and system performance problems. **Transverse joints** (connections perpendicular to airflow) are particularly vulnerable and often require draw bands or specialized couplings.

Ontario Building Code requirements for commercial ductwork are more stringent than residential, requiring engineered designs, fire dampers at rated assemblies, and compliance with ASHRAE standards. Commercial ductwork installation requires permits and inspections in all GTA municipalities. **TSSA oversight** applies to any gas-fired equipment connections, and **ESA licensing** is required for all electrical controls and damper motors.

Need help finding a commercial ductwork contractor? Toronto Ductwork focuses on residential applications, but you can find commercial HVAC and sheet metal contractors through the Toronto Construction Network directory. Commercial ductwork requires specialized fabrication equipment, engineering calculations, and experience with high-pressure system design that differs significantly from residential work.

Q7

What is the difference between single-wall and double-wall sheet metal ductwork in the GTA?

Single-wall ductwork is bare galvanized steel without insulation, while double-wall ductwork has a built-in insulation layer between inner and outer metal walls. The choice between them depends entirely on where the ducts will be installed in your GTA home and whether they'll be exposed to unconditioned spaces.

Single-wall galvanized steel ductwork consists of just the metal duct itself — typically 26 or 24-gauge galvanized steel formed into rectangular or round shapes. This is the standard choice for ductwork running through conditioned spaces like finished basements, interior walls, or mechanical rooms where the ambient temperature stays relatively stable year-round. Since the surrounding air temperature is already controlled, there's no risk of condensation forming on the duct exterior, and heat loss or gain through the duct walls is minimal. Single-wall ductwork costs $8-$20 per linear foot installed in the GTA and provides excellent durability and smooth airflow.

Double-wall ductwork features an inner metal liner, an insulation layer (typically R-4 to R-8), and an outer metal jacket. This construction is specifically designed for installations in unconditioned spaces where temperature differences between the conditioned air inside the duct and the surrounding ambient air create condensation and energy loss risks. In the GTA's extreme climate — with winter temperatures dropping to -20°C and summer temperatures exceeding 35°C — uninsulated ductwork in attics, crawlspaces, or unheated garages will sweat heavily during cooling season and lose enormous amounts of heat during winter.

GTA climate makes the location decision critical. During summer cooling, supply ducts carrying 12-15°C air-conditioned air through a 40°C attic will immediately form condensation on single-wall ductwork, leading to water dripping onto ceiling drywall, insulation damage, and mould growth. In winter, hot supply air at 50-60°C traveling through single-wall ducts in a -15°C attic loses so much heat that rooms receive lukewarm air instead of proper heating. The energy waste can increase heating bills by 20-40% compared to properly insulated ductwork.

Cost considerations show double-wall ductwork typically costs $15-$35 per linear foot installed — roughly 50-75% more than single-wall. However, this premium is often justified by the elimination of separate duct wrap insulation labor and materials. Installing single-wall ductwork in an unconditioned space and then wrapping it with R-8 duct insulation often costs nearly the same as double-wall ductwork while providing inferior performance due to thermal bridging at joints and potential installation gaps in the wrap.

Installation advantages of double-wall ductwork include faster installation in tight spaces since there's no separate insulation wrapping step, better protection of the insulation layer from damage during construction, and consistent insulation value without gaps or compression. The factory-applied insulation also provides superior sound dampening compared to single-wall ducts, reducing air noise transmission between rooms.

When to choose single-wall: Use for all ductwork running through conditioned spaces — finished basements, interior partition walls, mechanical rooms, and anywhere the ambient temperature stays within 10°C of the conditioned air temperature. Also preferred for main trunk lines in basement installations where the ducts will be wrapped with separate insulation for maximum R-value.

When to choose double-wall: Essential for any ductwork in GTA attics, crawlspaces, unheated garages, or exterior wall cavities. Also recommended for ductwork in basement ceiling installations where the basement is semi-conditioned but still experiences temperature swings. The built-in insulation and vapor barrier eliminate condensation risk and provide consistent energy performance.

Need help finding a ductwork contractor who understands GTA climate requirements? Toronto Ductwork can match you with experienced professionals who properly specify single-wall versus double-wall ductwork based on your home's layout and installation locations.

Q8

What is the proper way to join round spiral duct sections with a sheet metal sleeve in a GTA install?

Proper spiral duct joining with sheet metal sleeves requires mechanical fastening, sealing, and support to handle GTA's extreme temperature cycling. The sleeve method creates a strong, permanent connection that won't separate when ducts expand and contract through Toronto's -20°C winters and +35°C summers.

Sleeve Installation Process

Cut the sleeve from the same gauge galvanized steel as your spiral duct, making it 4-6 inches long and sized to slip over both duct ends with a snug fit. The sleeve should overlap each duct section by 2-3 inches minimum. Clean both duct ends of any debris, oil, or manufacturing residue that could prevent proper sealing.

Slide the sleeve over one duct end, then bring the two duct sections together inside the sleeve. The duct ends should butt together completely — any gap creates turbulence and reduces airflow efficiency. Position the sleeve so it overlaps both duct sections equally.

Mechanical Fastening Requirements

Secure the connection with self-drilling sheet metal screws — minimum three screws per side, spaced 120 degrees apart around the circumference. Use #8 x 1/2 inch screws for most residential applications. Drive screws through the sleeve into both duct walls beneath. This creates six penetration points that mechanically lock the joint against

separation under pressure or thermal movement.

For larger ducts (12 inches and above) or high-pressure applications, use four screws per side. The mechanical connection is critical — adhesive-only or tape-only connections will fail in GTA temperature extremes when ducts expand and contract repeatedly.

Sealing and Insulation

Apply duct mastic over the entire sleeve joint, covering all screw heads and the sleeve edges. Work the mastic into any gaps between the sleeve and duct surfaces. This creates an airtight seal and prevents the screws from loosening over time due to vibration.

After the mastic cures (typically 2-4 hours), apply UL 181-rated foil tape over the mastic for additional protection. The tape provides a smooth finish and extra insurance against air leakage.

If the duct runs through unconditioned space (attics, crawlspaces, unheated garages), wrap the entire joint area with R-8 duct insulation, extending 6 inches beyond the sleeve on each side. Secure the insulation with foil tape, ensuring the vapour barrier faces outward. This prevents condensation on the metal sleeve during cooling season — a common problem in humid GTA summers.

Support and Clearances

Install duct hangers within 3 feet of each sleeve joint to prevent the connection from carrying the weight of long duct runs. Use adjustable strap hangers or rigid supports rated for the duct weight plus insulation. Sleeve joints should never be located at direction changes or immediately adjacent to elbows where stress concentrates.

Maintain 1-inch clearance from combustible materials and 6 inches from recessed lighting fixtures. In attic installations, ensure adequate clearance above the joint for insulation installation and future access.

GTA-Specific Considerations

Toronto's clay soil causes foundation settling that can stress ductwork connections over decades. Sleeve joints provide more flexibility than rigid connections, reducing stress on the duct system as the house settles. The mechanical fastening is essential because temperature cycling in unconditioned spaces will cause adhesive-only connections to fail within 2-5 years.

When to Hire a Professional

While capable DIYers can handle sleeve connections in accessible basement locations, hire a sheet metal contractor for attic installations, complex routing, or connections to equipment. Professional installation ensures proper support, code compliance, and integration with the overall duct system design. Most GTA ductwork contractors charge $50-$150 per sleeve joint depending on location and accessibility.

Need help finding a qualified ductwork contractor? Toronto Ductwork can match you with local sheet metal professionals through the Toronto Construction Network.

Q9

How do Toronto contractors prevent oil-canning on large flat sheet metal duct panels?

Oil-canning (the flexing and popping sound of flat sheet metal panels under pressure changes) is prevented through strategic reinforcement, proper gauge selection, and installation techniques that account for Toronto's extreme temperature swings.

Oil-canning occurs when large flat sheet metal surfaces flex under static pressure changes as the HVAC system cycles on and off. In the GTA's climate, this problem is amplified because ductwork experiences dramatic temperature changes — from -20°C winter attic conditions to +50°C summer attic temperatures — causing metal expansion and contraction that worsens the flexing.

Material Selection and Reinforcement

Professional sheet metal contractors prevent oil-canning by using heavier gauge metal for large flat surfaces. While 26-gauge galvanized steel is standard for smaller ducts, large rectangular trunk ducts require 24-gauge or even 22-gauge steel to resist flexing. For rectangular ducts larger than 24 inches in any dimension, contractors add **cross-breaks** — shallow indentations pressed into the flat surfaces that create structural rigidity without affecting airflow. These cross-breaks act like ribs, preventing the panel from flexing under pressure.

Stiffening beams are another common solution for very large ducts. These are angle iron or hat channel reinforcements attached to the exterior of flat panels, particularly on the bottom of horizontal trunk ducts where gravity adds to the flexing forces. In Toronto's older homes with large basement trunk ducts (common in 1950s-1970s housing), adding external stiffeners to existing oil-canning ducts is often more cost-effective than complete replacement.

Design and Installation Techniques

Smart duct design minimizes oil-canning by avoiding unnecessarily large flat surfaces. Instead of one massive rectangular trunk, contractors often use **multiple smaller ducts** or **round spiral duct** which is inherently rigid due to its cylindrical shape. Round duct doesn't oil-can because it has no flat surfaces to flex.

When rectangular ducts are necessary, contractors use **proper support spacing** — supporting horizontal runs every 6-8 feet instead of the maximum 10 feet allowed by code. This prevents sagging that contributes to panel stress. They also ensure **balanced static pressure** throughout the system — oil-canning is often worse in systems with excessive static pressure due to undersized returns or blocked airflow.

GTA-Specific Considerations

Toronto's temperature extremes make oil-canning worse because metal expansion and contraction loosens joints over time, allowing more air leakage and pressure fluctuations. Contractors account for this by using **standing seam construction** on large ducts — joints that allow for thermal movement without loosening. They also ensure adequate **duct insulation** in attic installations, which reduces temperature cycling of the metal itself.

In older GTA homes, oil-canning often develops in existing ductwork as the system ages. Adding **internal liner** to large rectangular ducts can eliminate the noise while improving airflow characteristics, though this reduces the internal dimensions slightly.

When to Address Oil-Canning

While oil-canning is primarily a noise issue rather than a performance problem, it indicates that ductwork is experiencing stress that can lead to joint failures over time. Professional contractors address it during new installations through proper design and gauge selection, and can retrofit existing systems with stiffeners or liners when the noise becomes problematic.

Need help finding a ductwork contractor experienced with large duct fabrication? Toronto Ductwork can match you with sheet metal professionals who understand proper reinforcement techniques for GTA installations.

Q10

What type of sheet metal sealant is approved for use in Toronto residential duct fabrication?

For residential duct fabrication in Toronto, only UL 181-rated foil tape and water-based duct mastic are approved sealing materials under the Ontario Building Code. Grey cloth "duct tape" is specifically NOT approved for HVAC applications despite its misleading name.

UL 181 foil tape is aluminum-backed tape specifically engineered for HVAC duct sealing. It maintains adhesion through Toronto's extreme temperature swings from -20°C winters to +35°C summers, unlike standard duct tape which dries out and fails within 2-5 years in GTA climate conditions. The foil backing provides an excellent vapour barrier and the acrylic adhesive is formulated to handle the expansion and contraction that occurs with over 50 freeze-thaw cycles per winter in the GTA. Look for the "UL 181" marking on the tape roll — this certification ensures it meets performance standards for HVAC applications. GTA pricing runs $8-$15 per roll.

Duct mastic is the preferred sealing method for most professional installations. This water-based sealant is applied with a brush or gloved hand to all duct joints, seams, and connections. Mastic remains flexible throughout its lifespan, accommodating the thermal movement that's inevitable in Toronto's climate. It creates an airtight seal that won't degrade with temperature cycling, and it can fill gaps up to 1/4 inch wide. Professional ductwork contractors often use a combination approach — mastic for the primary seal with UL 181 tape over top for added durability. A gallon of mastic costs $15-$30 and covers 30-50 typical joints.

Why standard duct tape fails in Toronto: The grey cloth tape found in hardware stores uses a rubber-based adhesive that becomes brittle in cold temperatures and loses adhesion in heat. Toronto's temperature extremes cause this adhesive to fail rapidly, and the cloth backing doesn't provide an adequate vapour barrier. When these seals fail, conditioned air leaks into unconditioned spaces like attics and crawlspaces, wasting 20-40% of your heating and cooling energy.

For new duct fabrication, sheet metal contractors typically seal all longitudinal seams and transverse joints with mastic, then reinforce high-stress connections with UL 181 tape. This belt-and-suspenders approach ensures long-term performance in GTA conditions. Any work involving gas connections requires a TSSA-registered contractor, and associated electrical work needs an ESA-Licensed Electrical Contractor.

Need help finding a ductwork contractor who uses proper sealing materials? Toronto Ductwork can match you with experienced local professionals who understand Ontario Building Code requirements and GTA climate challenges.

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Q11

Can perforated sheet metal ductwork be used as a supply diffuser in a Toronto commercial fit-out?

Perforated sheet metal ductwork can function as a supply diffuser in Toronto commercial applications, but it requires careful engineering to meet airflow performance, noise criteria, and Ontario Building Code requirements.

Perforated ductwork essentially turns the entire duct surface into a linear diffuser, providing distributed air delivery along the length of the duct run. This approach is commonly used in industrial and warehouse applications where exposed ductwork is acceptable and broad air distribution is desired. However, several critical factors must be addressed for successful implementation in a commercial fit-out.

Airflow and Performance Considerations

The perforation pattern, hole size, and open area percentage directly affect air velocity, throw pattern, and pressure drop. Unlike traditional diffusers with engineered air patterns, perforated ductwork creates relatively uniform air discharge along its length. The **total open area of perforations must be calculated** to ensure adequate airflow delivery while maintaining proper air velocities. Too little open area creates high discharge velocities and noise; too much open area may not provide sufficient throw to reach occupied zones.

Static pressure calculations become more complex with perforated ductwork because pressure drops continuously along the duct length as air exits through perforations. The duct must be sized to maintain adequate pressure at the far end to ensure even air distribution. **Manual D calculations are essential** — this isn't a standard residential application where rules of thumb apply.

Ontario Building Code and Commercial Requirements

Commercial HVAC systems in Ontario must comply with **ASHRAE standards** referenced in the Ontario Building Code. The system must deliver the required air changes per hour for the specific occupancy type, maintain proper ventilation rates, and meet acoustic criteria. Perforated ductwork may struggle to meet **NC (Noise Criteria) ratings** required for office environments due to higher discharge velocities compared to engineered diffusers.

Fire and life safety considerations are critical in commercial applications. Perforated ductwork may require fire dampers at specific intervals depending on the building's fire rating requirements. The perforation pattern must not compromise the duct's structural integrity or fire resistance rating.

Practical Installation Challenges

Perforated ductwork requires **precise fabrication** to achieve the desired airflow characteristics. The perforation pattern typically needs to be custom-designed for each application rather than using standard patterns. Installation must ensure the perforated sections are properly oriented and supported to prevent sagging, which would affect air distribution patterns.

Balancing and commissioning becomes more complex because individual zones cannot be easily adjusted like traditional diffuser systems. Dampers must be installed upstream of perforated sections for flow control, and the entire system requires careful testing and adjustment to achieve design airflow rates.

When to Consider Alternatives

For most Toronto commercial fit-outs, **traditional diffusers and grilles** provide better control, easier balancing, and more predictable performance. Linear slot diffusers offer similar aesthetic benefits with engineered airflow patterns and adjustable air direction. Fabric ductwork systems provide distributed air delivery with better acoustic performance and easier installation.

Professional Design Required

This application requires an **HVAC engineer** to perform load calculations, duct sizing, and acoustic analysis. The mechanical contractor must have experience with custom sheet metal fabrication and commercial system balancing. A **building permit** will be required for the mechanical system, and the design must be stamped by a Professional Engineer licensed in Ontario.

Need help finding commercial HVAC contractors experienced with custom ductwork applications? Browse mechanical contractors in the Toronto Construction Network directory at torontoconstructionnetwork.com/directory?trade=hvac for professionals serving the GTA commercial market.

Q12

Can sheet metal ductwork be recycled when replaced in a Toronto home?

Yes, sheet metal ductwork can and should be recycled when replaced in Toronto homes. Galvanized steel and aluminum ductwork are valuable recyclable materials that scrap metal dealers actively purchase, and proper recycling keeps this material out of landfills while providing some cost recovery for your ductwork replacement project.

Galvanized steel ductwork — the most common type in GTA homes — is highly recyclable and worth approximately $0.10-$0.25 per pound at Toronto-area scrap yards, depending on current steel prices. A typical whole-house duct system weighs 200-800 pounds, so you might recover $20-$200 from recycling. **Aluminum ductwork** commands higher prices at $0.80-$1.50 per pound, though it's less common in residential applications. **Spiral round ductwork** and **rectangular trunk lines** have the highest scrap value because they contain more metal per linear foot.

Most reputable ductwork contractors in the GTA will handle recycling as part of their removal service, either crediting you for the scrap value or factoring it into their pricing. When getting quotes for duct replacement, ask contractors about their disposal practices — environmentally conscious contractors often highlight their recycling programs. Some contractors work directly with scrap dealers and can provide documentation showing your old ductwork was properly recycled rather than dumped.

Preparation for recycling involves separating materials properly. Pure galvanized steel and aluminum ductwork brings the highest prices, while ductwork with attached insulation, mastic sealant, or mixed materials may be accepted at lower rates. **Duct board** (fiberglass with foil facing) and **flex duct** are not recyclable through scrap metal dealers — these materials typically go to construction waste disposal facilities. **Asbestos-wrapped ductwork** found in pre-1980 Toronto homes requires specialized hazardous waste disposal and cannot be recycled through normal channels.

For DIY removal, Toronto residents can take clean sheet metal ductwork to scrap dealers like **Metalico Toronto** (multiple locations), **Uptown Scrap Metal** (North York), or **Toronto Scrap Metal** (Etobicoke). Call ahead to confirm current pricing and material requirements — some dealers require minimum quantities or charge processing fees for small loads. The City of Toronto's **Waste Wizard** tool also lists metal recycling options through the municipal waste system.

Environmental benefits of recycling ductwork are significant. Steel production from recycled material uses 75% less energy than producing new steel from iron ore, while aluminum recycling uses 95% less energy than primary production. Given that a typical GTA home ductwork replacement generates 200-800 pounds of recyclable metal, proper recycling prevents substantial environmental impact.

Timing considerations matter for scrap metal pricing, which fluctuates with global commodity markets. Steel and aluminum prices tend to be higher in spring and fall when construction activity peaks. If you're planning a ductwork replacement, your contractor can often store removed ductwork briefly to time the scrap sale advantageously.

When replacing ductwork in older Toronto homes, factor recycling value into your project budget. While it won't dramatically reduce your $5,000-$18,000 duct replacement cost, recovering $50-$200 from scrap metal helps offset disposal expenses and supports sustainable renovation practices.

Need help finding a ductwork contractor who prioritizes proper material recycling? Toronto Ductwork can match you with environmentally conscious professionals who handle removal and disposal responsibly as part of their service.

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Q13

What gauge sheet metal is used for residential ductwork in the GTA?

Residential ductwork in the GTA is typically fabricated from 26-gauge or 28-gauge galvanized sheet metal for branch runs, and 24-gauge or 22-gauge for trunk lines and plenums. The gauge number is inversely related to thickness — lower gauge numbers mean thicker, stronger metal. Choosing the correct gauge for each part of the duct system affects durability, noise, rigidity, and long-term performance.

For trunk lines — the main rectangular or round ducts that carry conditioned air from the furnace plenum to branch takeoffs — **24-gauge galvanized steel** is the standard across GTA residential installations. Trunks on larger homes or those spanning longer distances may use 22-gauge for additional rigidity and to prevent oil-canning, which is the annoying popping or booming sound that occurs when thinner metal flexes under pressure changes as the blower cycles on and off. If you hear your ductwork banging or popping when the furnace starts, undersized gauge on the trunk line is often the culprit.

Branch runs — the smaller round ducts running from the trunk to individual room registers — are typically **28-gauge** for ducts 8 inches in diameter or smaller, and **26-gauge** for ducts larger than 8 inches. These thinner gauges are adequate for shorter runs with lower airflow volumes, and they are easier for contractors to cut, crimp, and connect in tight residential spaces like joist bays and wall cavities.

Plenums and return air boxes are usually fabricated from **22-gauge or 24-gauge** galvanized steel because they are large, flat panels that are prone to flexing and oil-canning under the static pressure created by the blower. Heavier gauge metal resists this movement and reduces noise. Custom plenums fabricated by GTA sheet metal shops typically use 22-gauge as standard.

The Ontario Building Code and SMACNA (Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association) standards specify minimum metal thicknesses based on duct dimensions and pressure class. Residential systems operating at low pressure (up to 1 inch water gauge) follow the gauges described above, which are well-established across the GTA market. Some production home builders use 28-gauge for trunk lines to save material costs, which meets minimum code requirements but produces noisier, less durable systems — this is one area where builder-grade quality often falls short.

When getting quotes for ductwork in the GTA, ask your contractor what gauge they use for trunks versus branches. A contractor using 24-gauge trunks and 26-gauge branches is following best practice. If they are using 28-gauge throughout, you may experience more noise and the ductwork will be more susceptible to damage and denting over its lifespan. Material costs for stepping up one gauge are modest — typically $200 to $500 more for an entire residential system — but the improvement in durability and noise reduction lasts decades. Find experienced sheet metal contractors through the Toronto Construction Network directory for quotes on your ductwork project.

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Q14

What is the difference between galvanized steel and stainless steel ductwork for Toronto homes?

Galvanized steel is the standard material for residential ductwork in Toronto homes, while stainless steel is rarely used in residential applications due to its significantly higher cost and the fact that galvanized steel performs perfectly well for typical HVAC distribution. Understanding the differences can help you make an informed decision if you are considering exposed ductwork or have unusual corrosion concerns.

Galvanized steel ductwork is carbon steel coated with a thin layer of zinc through a hot-dip process. The zinc coating protects the underlying steel from corrosion by acting as a sacrificial barrier — the zinc corrodes first, protecting the steel beneath. In a typical Toronto home with normal humidity levels, galvanized ductwork lasts 20 to 30 years or more with no maintenance. The material is widely available from GTA sheet metal suppliers, every residential HVAC contractor works with it daily, and the pricing is economical at $8 to $20 per linear foot for round supply runs and $12 to $30 per linear foot for rectangular trunk lines, installed.

Stainless steel ductwork offers superior corrosion resistance because chromium in the alloy forms a self-healing oxide layer that prevents rust entirely. Stainless steel will not rust even in persistently damp environments, it withstands higher temperatures, and it has a sleek appearance that appeals to homeowners doing exposed industrial-style duct installations in loft conversions or open-concept basement renovations. However, stainless steel costs roughly three to five times more than galvanized steel — expect $40 to $80 per linear foot installed for residential stainless ductwork in the GTA. It is also harder to fabricate, requiring specialized tools and techniques, and fewer residential contractors work with it regularly.

For the vast majority of Toronto homes, **galvanized steel is the correct choice**. The zinc coating provides more than adequate corrosion protection for interior residential environments where ducts are not exposed to standing water or chemical fumes. The one situation where galvanized ductwork can struggle in GTA homes is in **persistently damp basements** where condensation forms on cold supply duct surfaces during humid summers. If condensation is not addressed through proper duct insulation (R-8 minimum duct wrap), the constant moisture can eventually exhaust the zinc coating and allow rust to develop — but the solution is insulating the ducts, not switching to stainless steel.

Stainless steel makes sense in very specific situations: commercial kitchen exhaust hoods (where grease and high temperatures degrade galvanized coatings), pool buildings (chlorine-laden air corrodes galvanized rapidly), or high-end exposed duct installations where the aesthetic premium is justified. For a standard residential HVAC system in a Toronto home, spending three to five times more on stainless steel ductwork provides no meaningful performance benefit over properly installed and insulated galvanized steel. Put that budget toward proper duct sizing, quality sealing with mastic, and adequate insulation instead — those investments deliver far greater returns in comfort and efficiency.

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Q15

How are sheet metal duct fittings fabricated for custom Toronto home HVAC systems?

Sheet metal duct fittings for custom Toronto home HVAC systems are fabricated either in a sheet metal shop or on-site by experienced sheet metal mechanics using specialized equipment to cut, bend, form, and assemble galvanized steel into elbows, transitions, offsets, tees, takeoffs, and plenums. Custom fabrication

is what distinguishes quality ductwork from cookie-cutter installations, and it is essential in older GTA homes where standard off-the-shelf fittings simply do not fit.

The fabrication process starts with **measurements and layout**. The contractor or designer determines the exact dimensions, angles, and profiles needed based on Manual D duct design calculations and the physical constraints of the home. In Toronto's older housing stock — pre-war homes in the Annex, Leslieville, and High Park, or post-war bungalows across Scarborough and Etobicoke — standard fittings rarely work because ceiling heights, joist spacing, and existing obstructions demand custom solutions. A skilled sheet metal mechanic takes precise field measurements and either fabricates fittings at their shop or cuts them on-site.

In the shop, fabrication involves several key steps. Flat sheets of galvanized steel (typically 24-gauge or 26-gauge depending on the fitting) are marked and cut using a shear or plasma cutter. The cut pieces are then formed using a brake (a machine that bends sheet metal along precise lines), a slip roll (for curving flat stock into round sections), and a Pittsburgh lock seamer or snap-lock former that creates the interlocking seams holding rectangular duct sections together. Elbows are made from multiple curved segments called gores or cheeks, welded or riveted together to create smooth turns that minimize airflow turbulence. Transitions — fittings that change from one duct size or shape to another — are laid out using geometric patterns and hand-cut to precise angles.

Round fittings like elbows, tees, and reducers are available as standard catalogue items from HVAC suppliers and are used whenever dimensions allow. However, custom round fittings are fabricated when non-standard angles or sizes are needed. Spiral duct, which is factory-produced with a continuous spiral seam, cannot easily be custom-fabricated on-site — it is ordered to specific lengths and diameters from suppliers.

On-site fabrication is common for plenums, transition fittings, and odd-angle offsets that are unique to each installation. Experienced GTA sheet metal contractors bring portable brakes, snips (straight, left-cut, and right-cut aviation snips), hand seamers, and rivet guns to the job site. All joints are mechanically fastened with sheet metal screws or rivets and then sealed with duct mastic or UL 181-rated foil tape as required by the Ontario Building Code.

The cost of custom fabrication adds $500 to $2,000 or more to a ductwork project compared to using only off-the-shelf fittings, but it results in a system that fits properly, has lower static pressure losses at fittings, and operates more quietly. Poorly fitting standard fittings forced into non-standard spaces create turbulence, noise, and air leakage that persist for the life of the system. When getting quotes from GTA contractors, ask whether they fabricate custom fittings or rely entirely on catalogue parts — this is a strong indicator of craftsmanship and experience.

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Q16

What is the lifespan of galvanized sheet metal ductwork in a Toronto home?

Galvanized sheet metal ductwork in a Toronto home typically lasts 20 to 30 years before showing signs of deterioration, and well-installed systems in dry, conditioned spaces can last 40 years or more. The actual lifespan depends heavily on the original installation quality, the environment the ducts operate in, and whether moisture has been properly managed throughout the system's life.

The zinc coating on galvanized steel is what provides corrosion protection, and in a dry interior environment — ducts running through a conditioned basement, for example — that zinc coating can protect the underlying steel for decades. Many post-war GTA homes in Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke still have their original 1950s and 1960s galvanized duct systems functioning adequately, making those systems 60 to 70 years old. The ducts themselves may still be structurally sound even when the rest of the HVAC system has been replaced multiple times. However, "functioning" and "performing well" are not the same thing — those aging systems were designed for heating only, are almost certainly leaking air at dozens of joints, and are typically undersized for modern cooling loads.

Moisture is the primary enemy of galvanized ductwork in GTA homes. Toronto's humid summers create condensation on cold supply ducts, especially in basements and attics where ducts are not properly insulated. Persistent condensation exhausts the zinc coating over time, and once the zinc is gone, the underlying carbon steel rusts rapidly. Ducts in damp basements — particularly in neighbourhoods with high water tables or clay soils that hold moisture against foundations — may show rust and pinholes within 15 to 20 years if condensation is not controlled with R-8 minimum duct wrap insulation. Conversely, ducts in dry, heated spaces can last essentially indefinitely.

Signs that your galvanized ductwork is reaching end of life include visible rust spots (especially at joints and seams where moisture collects), white powdery deposits on the exterior (zinc oxide, indicating the protective coating is breaking down), pinholes that allow conditioned air to leak, loose joints from decades of thermal expansion and contraction during Toronto's freeze-thaw cycles, and persistent musty odours that duct cleaning does not resolve (indicating mould growth on deteriorated interior surfaces).

When replacement is needed, expect to budget $5,000 to $18,000 for a complete duct system replacement in a typical GTA home of 1,500 to 2,500 square feet, including removal of the old system, asbestos testing if the home was built before 1985 ($200 to $500 for testing, $2,000 to $5,000 for abatement if positive), and installation of new galvanized ductwork with proper sealing and insulation. Replacing aging ductwork is one of the most impactful upgrades for older Toronto homes — a well-designed new system with sealed joints can reduce heating and cooling energy use by 20 to 40 percent compared to a leaky 30-year-old system, while dramatically improving

comfort and indoor air quality. Get matched with a ductwork contractor through the Toronto Construction Network for free estimates on duct system assessment or replacement.

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Q17

Can sheet metal ductwork rust in a damp Toronto basement?

Yes, sheet metal ductwork can absolutely rust in a damp Toronto basement, and it is one of the most common ductwork problems across the GTA. Even galvanized steel, which is specifically coated with zinc to resist corrosion, will eventually rust when subjected to persistent moisture from basement humidity, condensation, or water intrusion.

The mechanism is straightforward. During Toronto's humid summers — when dew points regularly reach 20 to 24 degrees Celsius and humidex values climb above 40 — your air conditioning system pushes cold air through supply ducts at roughly 12 to 15 degrees Celsius. When those cold duct surfaces are surrounded by warm, humid basement air, moisture from the air condenses on the outside of the ducts, just like a cold glass of water sweating on a summer day. If the ducts are not insulated with R-8 minimum duct wrap, this condensation occurs every day throughout the cooling season, dripping water onto the ducts, pooling at seams and joints, and saturating any surrounding materials.

Over time, this persistent moisture exhausts the zinc coating that protects galvanized steel. Once the zinc layer is consumed — which can take as few as 10 to 15 years in a consistently damp environment — the underlying carbon steel begins to rust aggressively. You will see orange-brown rust streaks at joints and seams first, because those are the spots where moisture collects. Eventually, pinholes develop, allowing conditioned air to leak out of the supply system and unconditioned, potentially mouldy basement air to enter the return system.

GTA basements are particularly prone to this problem because of the region's clay-heavy soils, which hold moisture against foundation walls and keep basement humidity levels elevated year-round. Homes in Scarborough, Mississauga, Brampton, and other areas built on heavy clay often have baseline basement humidity above 60 percent without active dehumidification. Combine that with uninsulated supply ducts running cold air conditioning through the space, and you have ideal conditions for condensation and corrosion.

Preventing duct rust in a Toronto basement involves three strategies. First, **insulate all supply ducts** with R-8 fibreglass duct wrap with a vapour barrier facing — this keeps the outer duct surface above the dew point so condensation cannot form. This costs $1.50 to $3.00 per square foot installed, and it is one of the best investments you can make for duct longevity. Second, **control basement humidity** by running a dehumidifier to keep relative humidity below 50 percent during summer, ensuring your foundation drainage is working properly, and addressing any active water intrusion. Third, **seal all duct joints** with mastic or UL 181 foil tape to prevent humid basement air from being drawn into the return system through leaky connections.

If you already have rust on your ductwork, have a contractor assess the extent of the damage. Surface rust on otherwise solid ducts can be addressed by cleaning, priming, and insulating. But if you find pinholes, flaking metal, or structural weakness at joints, those sections need replacement — patching rusted ductwork is a temporary fix at best.

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Q18

What are the advantages of spiral duct over rectangular sheet metal in Toronto homes?

Spiral round duct offers several meaningful advantages over rectangular sheet metal ductwork for Toronto homes, including fewer air leaks, lower noise, better airflow efficiency, and an increasingly popular industrial aesthetic for exposed installations. While rectangular duct remains the standard for trunk lines in most GTA residential systems, spiral duct is gaining ground as homeowners and contractors recognize its performance benefits.

Air leakage is dramatically lower with spiral duct. A rectangular duct has four longitudinal seams running its full length, plus cross-seams at every joint — each one a potential leak point. Spiral duct has a single continuous spiral seam that is machine-formed and inherently tight, with connections only at fittings and terminations. Studies consistently show that spiral duct systems leak 50 to 75 percent less air than rectangular systems of equivalent size. In a typical Toronto home where duct leakage wastes 20 to 30 percent of heating and cooling energy, switching to spiral duct for supply runs can produce noticeable energy savings and more consistent room temperatures.

Noise reduction is another significant advantage. Rectangular ducts are prone to oil-canning — the loud popping or booming sound caused by flat metal panels flexing when the blower cycles on and off and static pressure changes. Spiral duct's round cross-section is inherently rigid and resists this flexing, virtually eliminating oil-canning noise. The smooth interior of spiral duct also produces less air turbulence noise at higher velocities compared to rectangular duct with its corner turbulence. For Toronto homeowners who have lived with banging ductwork every time the furnace kicks on, spiral duct is a revelation.

Airflow efficiency is better in round duct because air flows most efficiently through a circular cross-section. A round duct has the lowest perimeter-to-area ratio of any shape, meaning less friction between the air and the duct walls for the same airflow capacity. This translates to lower static pressure in the system, reduced energy consumption by the blower motor, and the ability to use slightly smaller duct sizes compared to rectangular equivalents.

The aesthetic appeal of exposed spiral duct has made it a popular choice in GTA basement renovations, loft conversions, and open-concept layouts where homeowners want an industrial or modern look without building bulkheads to hide ductwork. Exposed spiral duct painted to match the ceiling or left in its natural galvanized finish is a design feature rather than an eyesore. This is particularly common in Toronto's older neighbourhoods where basements with low ceiling heights make every inch of headroom valuable — eliminating bulkheads by leaving spiral duct exposed can effectively add 6 to 10 inches of perceived ceiling height.

The tradeoff is cost and space. Spiral duct costs $10 to $25 per linear foot installed versus $8 to $20 for rectangular, and round duct requires more vertical clearance than a low-profile rectangular trunk. In tight joist bays, rectangular duct can fit where round cannot. Most GTA residential systems use a combination — rectangular trunk lines where clearance is tight, with spiral round branch runs for performance and aesthetics. Get matched with

experienced ductwork contractors through the Toronto Construction Network to discuss which configuration works best for your home.

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Q19

How do sheet metal contractors join duct sections in a Toronto residential installation?

Sheet metal contractors in Toronto join duct sections using a combination of mechanical seams, fasteners, and sealants that create airtight, durable connections designed to withstand decades of temperature cycling and vibration from the HVAC system. The specific joining method depends on whether the duct is round or rectangular, and whether the connection is a factory fitting or a field-fabricated joint.

For rectangular ductwork, the most common joining method in GTA residential installations is the **drive cleat and S-cleat system**. Two opposite sides of the duct section end in S-shaped folded edges (S-cleats) that slip over the mating section's raw edge, while the other two sides use drive cleats — flat metal strips bent into a channel shape that are hammered onto the overlapping duct edges to lock them together. This creates a rigid mechanical connection without welding. Another common method is the **Pittsburgh lock seam**, where one duct section has a pocket fold that the other section's edge slides into and is then bent over to create a permanent, self-locking joint. Pittsburgh seams are stronger than cleat connections and are standard for trunk line fabrication in quality GTA sheet metal shops.

For round ductwork, sections are joined using **crimped ends and slip connections**. One end of each duct section is crimped (reduced slightly in diameter using a crimping tool) so it slides inside the next section. The overlap is typically 1.5 to 2 inches, and the joint is secured with three or more sheet metal screws evenly spaced around the circumference. Spiral duct uses **beaded slip couplings** — external sleeves that fit over the joint between two duct sections and are secured with screws and sealed. These couplings create a clean, strong connection with minimal air leakage.

Mechanical fastening is required at every joint regardless of the connection method. Sheet metal screws (commonly #8 or #10 hex-head self-drilling screws, often called TEK screws or zip screws) are driven through overlapping metal at joints and fittings. The Ontario Building Code requires mechanical fastening at all duct connections — sealant alone is never sufficient. Rivets are used where screw heads would protrude into the airstream or where a cleaner appearance is desired, particularly on exposed spiral duct installations.

Sealing is the critical final step and the one most commonly skipped or done poorly in budget GTA installations. After mechanical fastening, every joint, seam, and connection point must be sealed with **duct mastic** (a thick, water-based paste applied with a brush or gloved hand) or **UL 181-rated foil tape**. The best practice, and what quality GTA contractors do, is a belt-and-suspenders approach — mastic applied generously over the joint, then foil tape over the mastic for reinforcement. Grey cloth duct tape, despite its name, is never acceptable for sealing HVAC ductwork because it dries out and fails within two to five years in Toronto's temperature extremes.

Unsealed joints are the single biggest source of energy waste in residential duct systems. A typical older GTA home with unsealed ductwork loses 20 to 30 percent of conditioned air through joint leaks before it reaches living spaces. When hiring a ductwork contractor, ask specifically about their sealing practices — a contractor who seals every joint with mastic and foil tape is demonstrating the attention to detail that separates quality work from cut-rate installations.

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Q20

What type of fasteners and connectors are used for sheet metal ductwork in the GTA?

Sheet metal ductwork in GTA residential installations uses a combination of self-drilling screws, rivets, cleats, draw bands, and slip connectors to create secure, airtight joints that hold up under decades of thermal cycling and system vibration. The specific fasteners and connectors vary depending on whether the ductwork is round or rectangular, and each serves a distinct purpose in the overall assembly.

Self-drilling sheet metal screws (commonly called TEK screws or zip screws) are the most widely used fastener in GTA residential ductwork. These are typically #8 or #10 hex-head screws with a drill-point tip that cuts through galvanized steel without a pilot hole. They are driven with a magnetic hex-head driver on a cordless drill and take seconds to install. Most GTA contractors use three to four screws at each round duct joint (evenly spaced around the circumference) and screws every 4 to 6 inches along rectangular duct seams and cleat connections. These screws cost just pennies each but are the primary mechanical fastening holding the entire system together.

Rivets — specifically POP rivets (blind rivets) — are used in situations where screw heads protruding into the duct interior would cause turbulence or noise, or where a cleaner exterior appearance is desired. This is especially

common on exposed spiral duct installations in basement renovations across Toronto, where the aesthetic of the ductwork matters. Rivets are installed with a hand rivet gun and create a flush, permanent connection. They cost slightly more in labour time than screws but produce a much cleaner finish.

S-cleats and drive cleats are the connectors used to join rectangular duct sections. An S-cleat is a folded strip of galvanized steel that hooks over the edges of two mating duct sections, locking them together. Drive cleats are flat channels hammered onto the remaining two sides to complete the four-sided connection. Together, they form a rigid mechanical joint that holds the rectangular profile together. These are fabricated by the sheet metal shop or purchased as standard fittings from HVAC supply houses across the GTA. A typical residential installation uses dozens of cleats — they cost $2 to $5 each.

Draw bands and clamps are used with round duct connections, particularly on larger diameter trunk lines and where spiral duct meets fittings. A draw band is a metal strap that wraps around the outside of a joint and is tightened with a bolt, compressing a gasket or simply clamping the overlapping sections together. These are standard on spiral duct beaded slip connections and provide a strong, adjustable connection.

Hanger straps and supports are the often-overlooked connectors that keep the entire system in place. Galvanized hanger strap (typically 1-inch wide perforated metal strapping) supports horizontal duct runs from floor joists, with supports required every 4 to 5 feet for round duct and every 4 feet for rectangular duct. Proper support prevents sagging, which creates low points where condensation collects and joints separate over time — a common problem in older GTA homes where original hangers have corroded or loosened.

After all mechanical fastening is complete, every joint must be sealed with duct mastic or UL 181 foil tape. The fasteners hold the ductwork together structurally; the sealant makes it airtight. Both are essential — fasteners without sealant create a leaky system, and sealant without fasteners will eventually separate under thermal stress and vibration. Quality GTA ductwork contractors use both without exception.

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Q21

Can I paint exposed sheet metal ductwork in my Toronto home or loft?

Yes, you can paint exposed sheet metal ductwork, and it is one of the most popular finishing touches in Toronto loft conversions and open-concept basement renovations. Painting galvanized steel or spiral round duct is straightforward as long as you prepare the surface properly and use the right products. The key is cleaning and priming — skip either step and the paint will peel within a year, especially in Toronto's climate where ducts expand and contract through extreme temperature swings.

Start by cleaning the duct surfaces thoroughly with a degreaser or TSP (trisodium phosphate) solution to remove the oily residue that coats new galvanized steel. If the ductwork is older, wipe down any dust, cobwebs, and surface oxidation. Once clean and dry, apply a **metal primer designed for galvanized surfaces** — a standard latex primer will not adhere properly to the zinc coating on galvanized steel. Rust-inhibiting primers work well and provide a solid base for your topcoat. For the finish coat, use a high-quality **acrylic latex paint** or a direct-to-metal (DTM) coating. Avoid oil-based paints on supply ducts carrying heated air, as they can off-gas odours when the system runs. Matte black, white, and industrial greys are the most common choices in Toronto lofts and converted warehouses in neighbourhoods like Liberty Village, the Distillery District, and King West.

Temperature is critical when painting ducts. Turn off your HVAC system while you paint and allow adequate drying time — at least 24 hours before running the system. If you paint supply ducts while the furnace is cycling, the primer and paint will dry too quickly on warm surfaces and will not adhere properly. In Toronto's winter, this means planning your painting project when you can tolerate having the furnace off for a day, or tackling it during the shoulder season in spring or fall when temperatures are moderate.

A few practical considerations: painting ductwork does not affect airflow or system performance as long as you do not paint over damper handles, making them inoperable, or paint register boots so thickly that registers no longer seat properly. If your exposed duct system has flex duct sections, those cannot be painted — only rigid metal duct takes paint well. Also, never paint over duct joints or seams in a way that prevents future access for sealing or repair. If joints are currently unsealed, apply **duct mastic or UL 181 foil tape** to seal them before priming and painting — you are already doing the prep work, so take the opportunity to seal leaks while the ducts are exposed and accessible.

For most homeowners, painting exposed ductwork is a reasonable DIY project. You will need a small roller, an angled brush for tight spots, and a spray can of primer for hard-to-reach areas behind hangers and supports. Budget approximately **$50 to $150 in materials** for a typical basement or loft duct run. If you want a flawless industrial finish on spiral duct, consider hiring a painter experienced with metal surfaces — expect to pay **$300 to $800** for a professional finish on a full room of exposed ductwork.

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Q22

What is the difference between snap-lock and Pittsburgh seam ductwork used in Toronto?

Snap-lock and Pittsburgh seam are the two most common methods of forming longitudinal seams on rectangular sheet metal ductwork, and they differ significantly in strength, air-tightness, and cost. Understanding the difference helps you evaluate the quality of ductwork being installed in your GTA home and ensures you are getting what you pay for.

Snap-lock seam ductwork is formed by folding the edges of the sheet metal so they interlock and snap together by hand or with a mallet. It is the faster, less expensive fabrication method and is widely used for residential ductwork in the GTA. Snap-lock is adequate for low-pressure duct systems — most residential heating and cooling systems operate at static pressures well within snap-lock's capability. However, snap-lock seams are inherently less rigid than Pittsburgh seams, making them more prone to flexing, oil-canning (the popping sound ducts make when the system cycles on and off), and air leakage at the seam if not properly sealed with mastic or UL 181 foil tape. In older Toronto homes where ductwork runs through unconditioned spaces like attics and crawlspaces, unsealed snap-lock seams are a common source of energy loss.

Pittsburgh seam (also called a Pittsburgh lock or hammer lock) is a more robust joint where one edge of the sheet metal is folded over and mechanically locked around the other edge, then hammered flat. This creates a significantly stronger, more rigid, and more air-tight seam than snap-lock. Pittsburgh seam ductwork is the standard for commercial and industrial HVAC systems and is used in higher-quality residential installations throughout the GTA. The seam resists vibration better, holds up under higher static pressures, and is far less likely to develop air leaks over time. If you are having new ductwork fabricated for a major renovation or new construction, specifying Pittsburgh seam is a worthwhile upgrade.

From a **cost perspective**, Pittsburgh seam ductwork typically adds **10 to 20 percent** to the material and fabrication cost compared to snap-lock. For a complete residential duct system in a typical GTA home costing **$5,000 to $15,000**, the upgrade to Pittsburgh seam might add **$500 to $2,000** — a modest investment considering the duct system will be in place for 25 to 50 years. Many reputable sheet metal contractors in the GTA fabricate Pittsburgh seam ductwork as their standard because the quality difference justifies the small additional cost.

When evaluating quotes from ductwork contractors, ask specifically which seam type they use. If a contractor quotes snap-lock, ensure they include **duct mastic sealing on all seams and joints** — this is essential regardless of seam type but is especially important for snap-lock to compensate for its lower inherent air-tightness. Both seam types meet Ontario Building Code requirements when properly sealed, but Pittsburgh seam delivers better long-term performance, less noise, and fewer air leaks over the life of the system. For exposed ductwork in a finished

basement or loft-style renovation, Pittsburgh seam also looks cleaner and more professional.

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Q23

Is phenolic duct board used in Toronto residential applications?

Phenolic duct board is rarely used in Toronto residential applications and is primarily found in commercial and institutional buildings where its superior insulation value and thinner profile justify the significantly higher cost. For the vast majority of GTA homeowners, standard galvanized steel ductwork with external fibreglass insulation or conventional fibreglass duct board remains the practical and cost-effective choice.

Phenolic duct board is a rigid insulation panel made from phenolic foam with aluminium foil facing on both sides. Its key advantage is an exceptionally high R-value per inch — approximately R-8.3 per inch compared to R-4.3 per inch for standard fibreglass duct board. This means phenolic duct board achieves the same insulation performance in roughly half the thickness, which is valuable in commercial buildings where ceiling space is tight and every inch of clearance matters. Phenolic board also has excellent fire resistance, very low smoke development, and does not support mould growth. It produces ducts that are lighter than sheet metal systems, which can be an advantage in certain structural situations.

The reasons phenolic duct board has not gained traction in Toronto residential work are primarily economic and practical. **The material cost is roughly three to five times higher than standard fibreglass duct board**, which already costs $10 to $22 per linear foot installed in the GTA. A phenolic duct board system for a typical residential installation would add thousands of dollars compared to conventional alternatives, with benefits that are difficult for a homeowner to justify. The specialized fabrication skills required are also a factor — not all GTA sheet metal contractors are experienced in cutting, scoring, and sealing phenolic board, and the adhesives and sealants used

are different from those used with fibreglass duct board.

There are niche residential scenarios in the GTA where phenolic duct board might be considered. In high-end custom homes with very tight ceiling cavities — such as a basement renovation where every inch of headroom matters — the thinner profile of phenolic board could allow a duct system to fit where conventional duct board or insulated metal duct would not. In heritage home renovations in neighbourhoods like Rosedale, the Annex, or Cabbagetown, where maintaining ceiling height is critical and space constraints are severe, some contractors have used phenolic board as a space-saving solution. However, these are uncommon situations, and most contractors will explore other options first — such as oval or low-profile rectangular metal duct — before turning to phenolic board.

For most Toronto homeowners, the practical alternatives deliver excellent performance at a fraction of the cost. Galvanized steel duct with R-8 external fibreglass wrap is the standard approach and provides reliable insulation, condensation prevention, and durability for 50 years or more. Fibreglass duct board — the more affordable rigid panel option — provides built-in insulation and sound absorption and is well-suited to residential trunk and branch duct fabrication. If you are working on a project where space is extremely constrained or you have specific performance requirements beyond typical residential needs, discuss all options with a qualified ductwork contractor. Browse HVAC and ductwork contractors in your area through the Toronto Construction Network directory to find professionals who can evaluate your specific situation.

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Q24

What is the correct way to transition from round to rectangular ductwork in the GTA?

The correct way to transition from round to rectangular ductwork is using a sheet metal transition fitting — sometimes called a square-to-round or reducer — that gradually changes the duct cross-section over a length of at least 1.5 to 2 times the largest dimension of the rectangular opening. A properly fabricated and installed transition maintains airflow, minimizes turbulence and pressure drop, and prevents the noise problems that result from abrupt shape changes.

The transition fitting itself is a custom-fabricated or standard-size sheet metal piece with a round opening on one end and a rectangular opening on the other, connected by tapered sides. The key design principle is that the cross-sectional area must remain consistent — or decrease gradually — through the transition. If the round duct is 8 inches in diameter (approximately 50 square inches of cross-sectional area), the rectangular opening should have at least 50 square inches of area as well (for example, 8 inches by 6.5 inches). Reducing the area through the transition restricts airflow and increases velocity, creating noise and pressure drop. Increasing the area causes the air to slow down and separate from the duct walls, creating turbulence.

The taper angle matters significantly. A gradual taper of 15 degrees or less on each side produces smooth airflow with minimal turbulence. Steeper angles — anything above 30 degrees — cause the airflow to separate from the duct wall, creating eddies and turbulence that generate noise (a low rumbling or whooshing sound) and increase static pressure drop. In tight GTA basements where space is limited, there is a temptation to use abrupt transitions with steep angles to save space. This is poor practice — the noise and performance penalty persists for the life of the system.

In Toronto homes, round-to-rectangular transitions are most commonly needed at the supply plenum connection (round furnace outlet to rectangular trunk duct), at register boots (round branch duct to rectangular wall or floor register), and in basement renovations where exposed round spiral duct transitions to concealed rectangular duct above a bulkhead or soffit. Register boots — the small transition fittings at each supply register — cost $15 to $40 each installed in the GTA, while larger custom transition fittings for trunk connections run $50 to $150 each depending on size and complexity.

Installation Best Practices

Every transition fitting must be mechanically fastened with sheet metal screws and sealed with duct mastic or UL 181-rated foil tape at both the round and rectangular connections. The round end is typically connected using a crimped fitting or a draw band (adjustable metal strap), while the rectangular end is connected with drive cleats or S-clips and screws. All joints must be airtight — transition fittings are high-stress points for air leakage because the shape change creates pressure variations that force air through any gaps.

If the transition connects to flex duct on the round end, the flex duct must be pulled taut over the round collar, mechanically fastened with a metal clamp (not a zip tie), and sealed with mastic. Loose flex duct connections at

transitions are one of the most common sources of duct leakage in GTA homes, especially in attic installations where connections work loose over time due to temperature cycling and gravity.

For any duct system modification involving transitions, having a professional sheet metal contractor fabricate and install the fittings ensures proper sizing, gradual taper angles, and airtight connections. Poorly fabricated transitions create permanent noise and efficiency problems that are frustrating to live with. Get matched with a qualified ductwork contractor through the Toronto Construction Network for your project.

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