GROW AND PROFIT

WEATHER AND YOUR TRADE: PLAN FOR IT, DON'T WAIT FOR IT

Heat, cold and storms drive demand in all three trades. The shops that do best plan for both the surge and the lull.

WEATHER MOVES THE WHOLE INDUSTRY

You don't need data to know that a heat wave fills the board. But the size of the effect is worth seeing. Distributor association HARDI reported that September 2026 sales rose 9% from a year earlier, as cooling degree days rose more than 40%. In July 2026, HARDI said the regions with the biggest increases in cooling degree days had the strongest sales, and the regions with big declines were the weakest. Going the other way, an industry survey of 2025 found cooling degree days down 4% nationally, with a sharper drop in the Southeast, and replacement demand fell with it.

Cooling degree days measure how far and how long temperatures run above a baseline. They're a rough proxy for how hard air conditioners work, and so for how many fail.

HOW EACH TRADE FEELS IT

AC and heating. Extended heat pushes equipment to run longer, and marginal parts fail. ACHR News reported in August 2026 that contractors are seeing longer heat waves cause more midseason breakdowns. Cold snaps do the same to furnaces and heat pumps. Mild weather does the reverse.

Plumbing. Hard freezes burst pipes, and the surge is sudden. One insurer's analysis put the average frozen-pipe claim at about $18,000. Storms and heavy rain bring sump pump and drain calls. Long mild stretches bring quiet.

Electrical. Storms bring surge damage, outages and generator calls. Insurers note that lightning and other weather events cause surge damage throughout the year. Peak heat loads trip breakers and reveal undersized panels.

TWO PROBLEMS, NOT ONE

Weather creates a surge problem and a lull problem. Most owners plan only for the first.

The surge. Calls double in an hour, and most of the money is lost on the phone, not in the field. See building a heat wave and freeze plan.

The lull. When the weather is mild, demand falls and fixed costs don't. See the shoulder season roller coaster.

WHAT LEADING CONTRACTORS HAVE DONE

Built phone backup before the storm. ACHR News reported on Mike Agugliaro, then owner of Gold Medal Service in New Jersey, who used an outside answering service for after-hours, emergency and overflow calls. When his own phones failed during a major storm, the outside agents kept answering, and he credited that backup with millions in revenue he would otherwise have lost.

Scheduled maintenance into the slow months. In the same publication, Robert Axelrod of Cooling Equipment Services in Illinois described doing maintenance work in the slow months. Robert Crawford of Abacus Plumbing and Heating in Houston said agreements put technicians in the home every spring and fall. Joe Kirby of Hawks and Co. in New Jersey said planned visits let the company find problems early and recommend repair or replacement before failure.

Worked their own customers instead of waiting. Trade columns describe contractors pulling lists of aging systems and open estimates and calling them before the season turns, rather than cutting marketing in the lull and overspending later.

Fixed the marginal parts before the heat. Contractors quoted in ACHR News make the point that a part that barely tests well in mild weather is likely to fail in the next heat wave, and replacing it early costs the homeowner far less than an emergency call.

MAKE WEATHER PART OF THE PLAN

- **Watch the forecast weekly.** Assign one person to look two weeks out and raise a flag.
- **Know your triggers.** Write down the temperatures or storm warnings that start your surge plan.

- **Book the calm weeks early.** Use equity mining and no-charge visits to fill them before they arrive.
- **Stock for the season.** Capacitors and motors before summer, igniters before winter, sump pumps and surge protectors before storm season.
- **Sell agreements.** Every agreement is a visit you can schedule when the weather won't do it for you.
- **Protect your people.** Heat in attics and on roofs is dangerous. See reducing safety risk.

THE GOAL

You can't control the weather. You can control whether a hot week ends with calls lost to voicemail, and whether a mild month leaves your techs sitting in the shop. The contractors who do best treat both as predictable, and plan for them like any other part of the business.

Sources: Distribution Strategy on HARDI, September 2026; Distribution Strategy on HARDI, July 2026; HVACR Trends on the William Blair 2025 survey; ACHR News, longer heat waves; Claims Journal on frozen-pipe claims; PropertyCasualty360 on surge losses; ACHR News, call-answering services; ACHR News, shoulder seasons. General information.

Published by Service ProCall. Last reviewed November 2026. General information, not legal advice.

BEST PRACTICES: EMPTY SLOTS AND THE SHOULDER SEASON

MAKE IT A HABIT

What good looks like

> Your slow months planned at least four to six weeks ahead.

> A target for how full each day should be, by trade and area.

> Fill work ready to book: tune-ups, inspections and lapsed members.

The habits

1. Look at last year's board by week, and mark the soft weeks before they arrive.
2. Start calling past customers four to six weeks before the slowdown.
3. Book by area and time window, so trucks aren't crossing town.
4. Keep a short list of easy yes visits: tune-ups, safety checks and filter or water heater service.
5. Hold back a slot or two each day for emergencies in peak season.
6. Review fill every morning and push the next three days first.

Signs it's time to get help

- Techs go home early or sit in the shop in slow weeks.
- You cut prices to fill the board.
- Nobody watches the next three days of open slots.

How one shop did it: Welsch Heating & Cooling (St. Louis, Missouri). Books maintenance agreement visits into the spring and fall windows, leaving room for two or three emergency calls a day. The slow in-between seasons are planned work instead of empty slots. ACHR News, July 2003

Where we fit: Service ProCall fills slow weeks from your own customer list with a no-charge visit, and ProCall Field shows the open slots by area and trade.

More on empty slots and the shoulder season