Snipps Heating & Air Explains Why the Same Furnace Is a Different Furnace in Silverton Than in Montrose

MONTROSE, CO, UNITED STATES, September 21, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Snipps Heating & Air Conditioning is encouraging Western Slope homeowners to confirm that their heating equipment was properly adjusted for elevation, as the first cold nights arrive in the mountain towns weeks ahead of the valley floor.

The company, which has served the region since 1996 and covers an area running from valley communities near 5,000 feet to mountain towns above 9,000 feet, says elevation is the most misunderstood factor in heating equipment on the Western Slope, and that it is not a matter of installer opinion.

The number on the nameplate is a sea-level number

Gas appliances are rated at sea level. Under the National Fuel Gas Code, those ratings stand unchanged up to 2,000 feet. Above that, input must be reduced at a rate of 4 percent for every 1,000 feet of elevation, and equipment has to be selected on the corrected figure rather than the nameplate.

The arithmetic matters. A furnace rated at 100,000 BTU input, installed at roughly 6,000 feet, works with about 16 percent less than its label suggests, and the gap widens higher up the mountain. A system chosen off the nameplate alone can be genuinely undersized for a January night at altitude even though the spec sheet looked generous.

The cause is straightforward. Thinner air carries less oxygen, and gas appliances need oxygen for clean combustion. Factory orifices are sized against a sea-level gas heating value, so at elevation the air-to-fuel ratio has to be corrected with a high-altitude kit that changes the orifices and the input rate.

What happens when it is skipped

Derating keeps the fuel-to-air ratio inside a safe range, stabilizes the flame, and protects the heat exchanger. Without it, the failure modes are predictable: incomplete combustion and elevated carbon monoxide, nuisance lockouts, and overheating.

This is not a rare oversight. Trade reporting has identified elevation derate performed incorrectly or not at all as one of the most common errors seen by Colorado distributors, with poor comfort the visible result and the safety implications underneath it. Manufacturer installation manuals place responsibility for adjusting the input squarely on the installer.

Two details that matter more in the high towns

Many manufacturers state in their installation instructions that their equipment is not approved for installation above a specific elevation, commonly 8,000 or 10,000 feet. Installing above that threshold can void the warranty and fail inspection, which is a live consideration in the highest communities in the region rather than a theoretical one.

Propane is also its own case. LP behaves differently from natural gas in combustion, and natural gas derating tables do not transfer to propane equipment, a distinction that matters across the many Western Slope properties not served by a gas main.

Cooling is affected as well, if less dramatically. At altitude, fans move less air for the same speed and heat transfer is slower, so air conditioning and heat pump capacity also come in below nameplate.

What homeowners can ask

Snipps recommends property owners ask three questions about any furnace installed in the last several years: whether an altitude derate was performed, whether a high-altitude kit was installed, and whether a combustion test was run and documented at commissioning. A homeowner who cannot get a clear answer has a reason for an inspection before the season sets in.

The company notes that the mountain communities in its service area are already into heating weather while Montrose and the valley are not, which makes the next few weeks the practical window to have work done on a schedule rather than during a no-heat call.

Snipps provides 24-hour emergency HVAC service at (970) 240-8152.

About Snipps Heating & Air Conditioning

Snipps Heating & Air Conditioning is a family-run HVAC contractor based in Montrose, Colorado, serving homes and businesses across Montrose, Delta, Ouray, San Miguel, Gunnison, San Juan, and Hinsdale counties since 1996. Service areas include Montrose, Delta, Olathe, Cedaredge, Hotchkiss, Cimarron, Ouray, Ridgway, Telluride, Silverton, Gunnison, Crested Butte, and Lake City. Services include heating repair and installation, furnaces, heat pumps, air conditioning, ductless mini-splits and retrofits, indoor air quality, maintenance plans, new construction, and property management support. The company operates its own sheet metal fabrication shop for custom

ductwork, employs NATE-certified technicians, services all makes and models, and is an authorized Amana dealer. Snipps offers free estimates, financing, a 30-day service warranty, a one-year installation warranty, and a 10 percent discount for senior citizens and military veterans. Snipps is located at 113 Rose Lane, Suite C, Montrose, CO 81401.

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