American Lung Association® of the Upper Midwest Health House®

dehumidifiers: tips for the use and care of home dehumidifiers

Moisture in your home can be a problem when there is either too much or too little. Humidity is the amount of moisture or water vapor in the air. People tend to feel more comfortable when the relative humidity is between 35-50%. High levels of humidity can cause problems, such as a room to feel stuffy and for biological contaminants to thrive. High levels of moisture can also affect your home by causing wood to rot and condensation on windows. Removing moisture can make a room feel more comfortable.

Moisture can enter the home in many ways. Outside sources include the soil, surface water and outside air. Breathing and perspiration by you and your family are a major source of moisture. So is showering, bathing, drying clothes, washing dishes and cooking. Most homes have more than one source of moisture. A little prevention can keep excess moisture out of your home. Identify moisture sources in your home and try to correct them.

Symptoms of humidity problems

Too much humidity

- Condensation on windows
- Wet stains on walls and ceilings
- Moldy bathroom
- Musty smells
- Allergic reactions
- Can lead to damage to the house and contents
- Ongoing allergies
- Promotes mold growth and dust mite proliferation

Too little humidity

- Chapped skin and lips
- Scratchy nose and throat
- Static and sparks
- Problems with electronic equipment
- Damage to furniture

In addition to identifying and correcting any of your home's moisture sources, a dehumidifier can be used to help control the humidity in your home.

General types of dehumidifiers

- Heat pump dehumidifier: Draws moist air over coils that are close to freezing allowing the moisture to condense and be drained away.
- Chemical adsorbent dehumidifier: Absorbs moisture from the air with a desiccant, a drying agent, located on a heat exchange wheel. This type was designed for use in hot, humid climates.
- Dehumidifying ventilator: Sensor-controlled exhaust fan. You set the control to the desired humidity level. These are particularly effective if your humidity source is your basement.

Suggestions for use and care of home dehumidifiers

- Empty the tank; wipe all surfaces dry to reduce the growth of microorganisms. Be sure you unplug the unit from the electrical socket first.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions on the use of cleaning products or disinfectants.
- Do not dehumidify to indoor relative humidity levels below 35%. Lower humidity levels may cause chapped lips and skin, scratchy nose and throat, breathing problems, and static problems. Hygrometers, available for purchase at most hardware stores, may be used to measure humidity levels.
- Clean the dehumidifier, as directed, at the end of the hot-humid season or when you know it will not be used frequently. Before storage, make sure all parts are dry and dispose of all used demineralization cartridges, cassettes, or filters.
- Check operational temperatures before purchasing dehumidifiers, as some are designed for temperatures above 75° F, and some will function at temperatures down to 45° F.
- Stop using your dehumidifier and contact your physician if you have respiratory problems.

For further information:

- American Lung Association®: www.LungUSA.org
- American Lung Association® of the Upper Midwest Health House®: www.HealthHouse.org
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation: www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/burema/gesein/abhose/abhose_ce27.cfm
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): www.EPA.gov/iaq
- Local Health Department

These tips are brought to you by the American Lung Association® of the Upper Midwest Health House® program. For more information on creating a healthier home environment, visit our website at www.HealthHouse.org.

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