

Office Humidifiers

A Fact Sheet Prepared by the UW Superior Environmental Health and Safety Office

Winter's dry air can cause a person to experience dry irritated skin, eyes, sinus passages, scratchy throats and sinus congestion, and add to static buildup on fabrics and carpeting. Using a humidifier to add moisture to the air can help reduce these symptoms and increase your comfort. Most experts recommend a relative humidity of 25-50% for optimum comfort, but this is hard to achieve in northern climates without causing condensation on exterior windows. Humidity greater than 50% promotes the growth of molds, mildew, and dust mites, all of which can produce allergic reactions in susceptible individuals. This fact sheet is intended to help UW Superior employees in selecting and maintaining a humidifier that will provide them some relief of dry air symptoms.

What Should You Look for When Purchasing a Humidifier?

Humidifiers can be purchased using department budgets from local or state contract vendors and must be maintained by the department. Here are some tips for purchasing a humidifier.

- ❑ The preferred types of humidifiers for use at UW Superior are:
 - Evaporative humidifiers. This type of humidifier adds cool, invisible moisture to the air using a fan that blows through or past an absorbent belt, wick or filter.
 - Steam vaporizers or "warm mist" humidifiers. This type of humidifier will add "steam" moisture to the air by heating water with heating elements. This type requires more power to operate, and may not be beneficial in spaces already experiencing electrical shortages.
- ❑ Avoid ultrasonic and impeller humidifiers, as they disperse materials from their water tanks into indoor air, such as microorganisms and minerals.
- ❑ Select a portable or floor model according to the manufacturer's recommendations for the area to be humidified. Humidifiers are usually "sized" according to their output per day—be sure to check the tank size to determine if the tank will need to be filled multiple times per day to achieve the rated output.
- ❑ Examine the unit to determine how easy it is to clean and fill. Keep in mind that some floor models need to be wheeled to a sink to be filled, and that large tanks can be awkward to clean.
- ❑ Look for a unit that has a quiet fan, multiple fan speeds, and if possible, a built-in humidistat. A humidistat will prevent the unit from putting too much moisture into the air.
- ❑ Remember to purchase a spare belt, wick or filter when you purchase the humidifier.

Important Use and Care Tips

Humidifier tanks, wicks, filters, or belts are breeding grounds for molds, bacteria and other microorganisms. Regular cleaning of the humidifier is extremely important for the health of the users.

- ❑ Regularly clean and sanitize the humidifier following the manufacturer's directions and schedule. EH & S recommends at least monthly cleaning during use.
- ❑ Do not allow water to stand in the tank for extended periods of time (2-3 days).
- ❑ Use disinfectants and other water additives ONLY IF recommended by the manufacturer.
- ❑ Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for filter, belt or wick changes.
- ❑ Clean the humidifier before storing and dispose of all used demineralization cartridges, cassettes, or filters. Install fresh materials at the start of the next season.
- ❑ Keep humidity levels below 50% RH to prevent the growth of biological organisms. Monitor humidity levels using hygrometers, available at local hardware stores or office supply catalogs.
- ❑ If water condenses on windows, walls, paper or office equipment, relocate the humidifier, lower its humidistat setting, or reduce its use.
- ❑ Stop using the humidifier if it aggravates a health problem or if it needs cleaning.