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Elusive Comfort

Comfort can be an elusive condition. Some people are comfortable at a wide range of temperatures

and humidity and others have a very narrow window for their comfort. Outdoor comfort is out of the scope of this article because it is beyond our control. It does play into this topic though because how you dress indoors and out is what keeps you comfortable. High humidity can be the worst of all parameters for us because it can affect respiration as well as our ability to perspire which is our bodies cooling system. In cold months indoor humidity is usually very low because colder air cannot hold moisture. That gives the perception of it being even colder inside than it really is because your skin is allowing body moisture to evaporate and that causes cooling. In the summer keeping the relative humidity below 50% indoors will do the same thing. It actually allows you to be comfortable at a higher temperature. The problem with most residential air conditioning systems is that they are oversized and that prevents them from removing moisture from the air. There are some very interesting controls on the market that can cause an air conditioning system to create a much more comfortable indoor atmosphere. An additional benefit is that you will save electricity by keeping the indoor temperature a few degrees warmer and still be comfortable. Oversized systems make your skin feel clammy because the air is cool but also holding a lot of humidity. Turning off the air conditioner and opening windows may seem like a good idea but the times of year when that seems like a good idea are the same times of year when pollen counts are at the highest and many people are bothered by pollen. Along with pollen, humidity enters when windows are open, and the next day the air conditioning system has to work extra hard to remove that moisture.

The best overall plan for summer indoor comfort is to set the thermostat at the highest temperature that you can be comfortable and if humidity seems to be a problem, call a professional HVAC company for recommendations on lowering that humidity. It doesn't mean system replacement, it means controlling the fan differently. One system I've used is called Fanhandler and it is relatively simple but has a profound effect on humidity removal. I consulted with them several times before and since have used their product and it is my favorite way to improve indoor comfort in summer. It also performs in the winter if you have a heat pump by controlling airflow and stopping that cool drafty feeling.

Ken Field is the owner of Slate Belt Energy and Field's Service, Inc. As a certified energy rater and contractor, he is qualified to assess every aspect of energy usage and prescribe solutions to save energy. He can be reached at 610-759-6306 or email Ken@FieldsService.com

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