



# It's Not the Heat (or the Cold), It's the Humidity!

*Extreme weather should sound the alert for proper climate control.*

*By John Dunlap – Editor, SSA Globe*

Autumn may be here, but the lingering aftereffects from this past summer's extreme heat still cause people in places like Texas, Oklahoma and numerous other states to shake their heads. And winter is coming, which is highly likely to result in some bitter cold weather for much of the nation. No matter your take on the damage we have done to our environment, the cold (or hot), plain truth is that the United States has been hit with extremely bad weather over the last decade. Which makes climate control an even more critical element in facilities where weather can get brutal.

Obviously, customers shopping for self storage are getting more and more savvy every day when it comes to what you have to offer. They are well aware that climate control is a key selling point. The question is, how savvy are you about climate control?

Here's a quick quiz:

1. Do you think just having heat or air conditioning to maintain a steady temperature is enough?
2. Do you think having any kind of dehumidifier is good enough to do the job?
3. Are you OK with maintaining the status quo?

If your answers to these questions was "Yes" then you may be putting your customers' prized items at risk, even when you think you are being an exemplary owner/operator. On the one hand, you are to be commended for realizing the value of climate control; on the other hand, you may be doing less than you think.

## Scorching Hot

Emergency preparedness involves much more than dealing with a hurricane, tornado or earthquake. While all those catastrophes require self storage owner/operators to be able to react quickly, extreme weather patterns can even take more of a toll, as the heat this past summer made entirely clear.

"During the spring months we usually have very high humidity and it stays hot and muggy most of the summer," says Micki Seay, manager of Colonial Mini Storage in Cleburne, Texas. "The heat can become so extreme inside a conventional (non-climate controlled) unit that I have seen melted CD cases and heard stories of LCD televisions

being damaged and furniture being warped—all due to extreme heat."

Indeed, this past summer Cleburne experienced over six weeks of consecutive 100°F+ temperatures.

"With conditions like that, most customers are looking for climate control," adds Seay. "We typically stay at 100% occupancy on our climate controlled units from late May in to September or October. Many customers want the relief of not having to worry about the heat and the effect it could have on their belongings in a conventional unit."

And in Louisiana, where it seems to be hot and muggy all the time, summers like this past one put everyone on edge.

"This past summer was particularly hot," says Ben Evans, asset manager of Discount Self Storage in Shreveport, Louisiana. "At one point, we had four days in a row of 107°F+ temperatures. Although the summer was relatively dry, rainy seasons can produce intense humidity, especially

*See Climate Control, page 20*



*Dehumidifiers can be placed in numerous locations at self storage facilities without getting in the way.*



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when coupled with summer heat. We have customers who have expressed concern, particularly over wooden furniture items and documents that can warp in extremely hot and humid environments.”



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***“The issue with climate control is understanding when it is climate control and when it is just temperature control.”***

*~ Mike Carr  
Therma-Stor*

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Given that fact, one would think it somewhat inconceivable that there are still many, many self storage facilities who shun climate control.

“Yes, there is still a large amount of storage without climate control,” says Mike Carr of Therma-Stor, makers of the Quest line of products, based in Madison, Wisconsin. “I believe the vast majority of it is just non-climate controlled ‘garage rental.’ I do believe that the demand for climate control is growing through customer awareness. Storage operators are aware of the damage done in non-climate controlled facilities, but they believe HVAC temperature control alone is the solution.”

## Humidity Is Key

Of course, if you are located in San Diego, where temperatures are almost always in the 70’s and 80’s with little humidity, climate control may not be an issue. But in most parts of the U.S., this is not the case. All of which begs the question: in severe heat and cold, is controlling the temperature of self storage units necessarily the answer?

“The issue with climate control is understanding when it is climate control and when it is just temperature control,” adds Carr. “Without humidity control there are periods of time when there is not true climate control. Granted HVAC does a certain amount of climate control in many geographical areas; but HVAC temperature control alone does not assure climate control.”

“A 90°F day in Arizona is not the same as a 90°F day in Florida. When the HVAC cools the Arizona facility it is cool and dry. When it cools a Florida facility it is cool and *maybe* dry. The problem is in humid outside climates—anywhere there is green grass—HVAC alone cannot control humidity. What does an A/C unit do when

it is 70°F and pouring rain outside or at night when it is cooler? The answer is *nothing*.”

“I never realized that having the building heated and cooled would not be enough to control humidity,” adds Seay. “We started noticing, in one of our climate control buildings, on days that were very muggy and hot, the air in that building seemed heavy and just not as crisp as it should be. We made several attempts to correct this by changing the A/C settings and it actually seemed to make the problem worse. We then contacted Mike Carr with Therma-Stor. Mike sent over a ton of information concerning humidity and climate control and helped us find the right dehumidifier for our situation. We now have two Quest dehumidifiers and they have made a huge difference.”

Carr feels that many people in self storage are misinformed when it comes to climate control and offers a fairly simple mantra for them to remember: *high and dry*.

“The big misconception is that cooling always dehumidi-



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fies,” he says. “Storage facilities are not living spaces. The temperatures should be kept at a minimum in the winter, to avoid freezing and have clients adequately comfortable with a jacket. In the summer it should be kept as high as possible while controlling humidity.

“Temperatures should be controlled so it is not unbearable when a person walks in. That comfort level is influenced by the humidity level—80°F and dry is more comfortable than 80°F and damp. As for damage to what is being stored, it depends on what is being stored. Wine, pharmaceuticals, film, etc. may be temperature sensitive. Grandma’s couch is not as temperature sensitive. In the winter, 50°F would be adequate. In the winter it is not as humid, so humidity control is not as crucial to protecting stored items. Just keep things from freezing and the clients from being uncomfortable so they will want to store with you. Keep the temperature as low as you can get away with in the winter to save money, but still satisfy the client.”

“A dehumidifier more efficiently removes water, gives you asset protection and does not lower the temperature,” Carr said. ❖