



*By Jim Basara - GJD*

The dry winter season is upon us, and if I was forced to pick the single most dangerous environment for a guitar (other than in the hands of Pete Townsend when he's in the mood to smash one) it would be cold, dry air.

I love getting paid to repair guitars, just like a doctor is happy to get paid to fix people. But just as that doctor hates seeing people injured because they were stupid, I hate seeing guitars that are injured because their owners were neglectful. Yet every winter there comes a rash of "neck injuries" that could have been avoided if the owner made just a little effort to control the environment for their guitars. If you had a beautiful car, would you choose to park it under a dripping pine tree, or where it was constantly being sprayed with ocean spray? Of course not. So why do most guitar players not spend a small amount of money to keep properly maintain the guitars they claim to love so much?

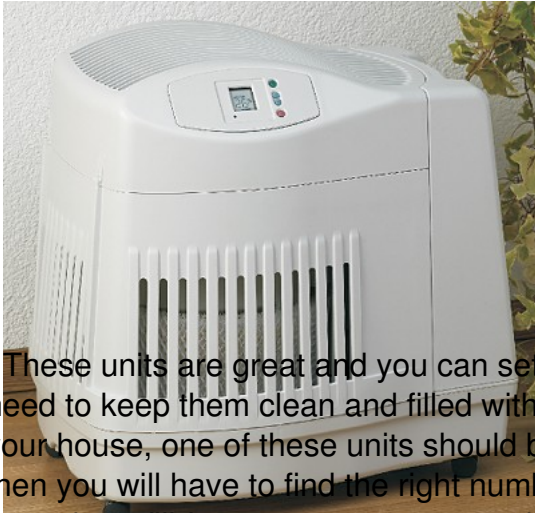
The principle is quite simple. Wood, like our skin, needs moisture to keep from drying out. If wood, like our skin, dries out, bad things happen. The effects include finish cracking, neck warping, back and top separation and exposed fret ends. Neck warping is probably the most common. Remember that neck tension is set when the neck is humidified and supple. If the neck dries out, it becomes brittle and weak, and the neck tends to reverse warp under the pressure of the truss rod. Thinner, unfinished necks are the most prone to such problems. Jackson necks, for instance, are famous for this, and I have reshaped a variety of these necks because some poor soul let the humidity drop to under 20% in their house for a week or two. All of the effects of dry conditions can be major repairs and some can be absolutely catastrophic. Having the top of your multi-thousand dollar instrument crack because you didn't spend \$20 on a case humidifier can qualify you for this year's Darwin Awards.

Too many players believe the erroneous notion that "If it's comfortable for me, it's comfortable for the guitar." I'm not sure who first put that out on the Internet, but it has been widely replicated and adopted by guitarists, probably because people naturally don't want to have to make any effort if they don't have to. This is the worst guitar related advice I've seen. I'm comfortable in 60 degree heat and 20% humidity. Give me a balmy, dry day in the middle of winter and I'm a happy man. A guitar, however, is extremely uncomfortable. And if the humidity happened to have dropped down to that level from say 45% in a one-day period, then your guitar neck might just let you know exactly how uncomfortable it is. I've literally heard the "snap" of a neck on a Jackson reverse warp after the humidity went from 30% to 19% over the course of a day. It's like hearing a bone crack and it can be a very costly repair.

There are a few easy ways to keep your environment safe for your instruments. Here are a few points for discussion.

1. Central house humidifier – This is the most expensive of the available solutions, and it really isn't the best. A house humidifier plug into your home's HVAC system to pump humidity through the central heat and air. The quality of these vary, but I find that on their own, they tend to be insufficient for guitar purposes (or wine for that matter).

2. Room humidifier – These are standalone units that you manually fill with water. An example of a good unit is the Sears Kenmore model, shown below.



These units are great and you can set them for the level of humidity that you want. You just need to keep them clean and filled with water. If you keep all of your guitars in one place in your house, one of these units should be fine. If your guitars are distributed in different rooms, then you will have to find the right number for your home to maintain the desired humidity and to keep the refill frequency to an acceptable level. I live in a three level townhome and have guitars on every floor, as I should. I have one of these units on every floor and have to fill them about twice per week.

3. Case humidifier – If you keep your guitars in cases, you may want to start by trying a good case humidifier. And, if you travel with your guitar a lot, or gig a lot, or tend to leave your guitars in the trunk of a car for a while, then a good case humidifier is essential.

There are a variety of types of case humidifiers. Depending upon the situation, we've settled on two different models and both of these work well: the Planet Waves Large Instrument Humidifier and the Oasis Case Humidifier. Pictures of each of these are shown below:

Planet Waves Large Instrument Humidifier



Oasis OH 6 Humidifier



~~...the humidity is not the problem, it's the temperature. The humidity is not the problem, it's the temperature. The humidity is not the problem, it's the temperature.~~



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