

CUSTOM MECHANICAL, INC.

Phone (302) 539-5177 or (800) 233-5177 • Fax (302) 537-5191
Post Office Box 1479 • Bethany Beach, DE 19930
Online www.custommechanical.com



Coping with Cold

by Regan Roberts, Chief Operations Officer

The unusually consistent cold this winter has really put a strain on a lot of heating systems and there's one issue we've heard more about than any other because of it: the worry that there's something wrong with the HVAC system because the heat is running all the time. Well, when temperatures are consistently at or below freezing, this is usually not an indication of a problem with your heat pump.

Somewhere between 25 and 40° F, your heat pump reaches its balance point. At this point, your heat pump's output exactly equals the heating needs of the conditioned space so your heat pump needs to run constantly to produce enough heat to maintain a comfortable indoor temperature.

Below the balance point, supplementary heat is needed to maintain your thermostat's set point so your auxiliary or electric heat will kick on, usually indicated by a light on your thermostat. Your electric heat will run just long enough to satisfy your thermostat's set point before turning off again. If the outdoor temperature remains below your system's balance point, your indoor temperature will drop a few degrees while your heat pump tries to keep up before your electric heat turns on again. So, don't be alarmed if you've got the thermostat set at 70° and it's only reaching 68°. To maintain 70° below your balance point, turn your thermostat up to 72° or 73°, but keep in mind that your electric heat will run longer to reach that temperature.

In the meantime, you can make the most of that bought air your heat pump is working so diligently to circulate throughout your home by putting those D.I.Y. gloves on. Start by sealing any drafts around windows, doors and even outlets. Carefully check suspect areas with a candle or lighter (adults only, please) and block drafts with caulk, weather-stripping or draft socks. Open curtains or shades on sunny days to let the sun heat the house. Close them at night to preserve heat.

At the same time, consider the humidity level in your home. High levels of static electricity, dry nose or throat, cracking lips, nosebleeds, dry houseplants and hardwood floors and peeling wallpaper are all symptoms of low humidity levels. Raising the humidity in your home would allow you to lower your thermostat and feel warmer at the same time.

Luckily, there a lot of different ways to increase the moisture in your home, from quick, temporary fixes like boiling water on your stove (just make sure to keep a keen eye on it) to leaving your bathroom door open when you shower. The most comprehensive and efficient way to solve a low humidity problem, though, is with a humidifier. This can be a simple stand-alone unit or a unit connected directly through your heating and air system. Either way, the benefits of optimal humidity levels in your home include increased comfort, warmer-feeling air, lower utility bills and none of problems mentioned above!

As always, at Custom Mechanical we are happy to answer any questions you may have about electrical, heating, air conditioning and plumbing related issues. Our Retail Store offers heating, air conditioning, electrical and plumbing parts and supplies as well as answers to your product or pricing queries. Our Comfort Advisors are available for free estimates and information about financing, manufacturer rebates and, of course, tax rebates. Our Retail Store offers parts and supplies as well as answers to your product or pricing queries. Finally, our website offers more homeowner tips like these as well as on-line scheduling and more detailed information about Custom Mechanical, the people that make us great and the services we offer. Contact us anytime! Locally, 302-539-5177. Toll free, 800-233-5177. Or on the web, www.custommechanical.com. Take COMFORT, CUSTOM is here to help!

P.S. Think about scheduling your plumbing dewinterization or next maintenance check ASAP, especially if you'll be working around renters this coming season to ensure the most convenient appointment possible. (And don't forget to restock and/or wash or change your filters!)

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