



WHITEPAPER

COOLING ELECTRICAL ENCLOSURES WITH SPECIAL-PURPOSE AIR CONDITIONERS

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SUMMARY

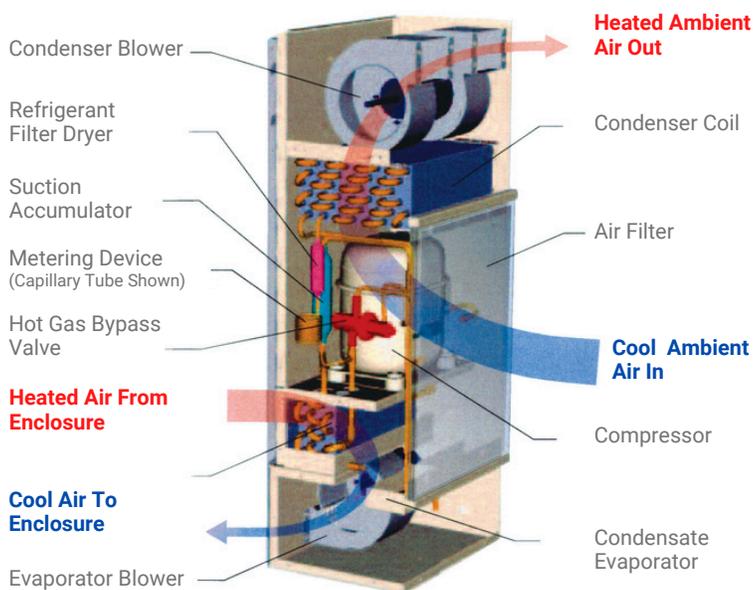
Understanding how special-purpose air conditioners work can help you decide if they are right for your equipment cooling needs.

INTRODUCTION: WHY DO I NEED ENCLOSURE COOLING?

Within all types of electrical enclosures, heat-producing power and control components are being packaged in less space, increasing power density and creating high temperatures. Computers, programmable logic controllers, microprocessors, variable-speed drives, and power conversion and storage devices have found their way into every industrial and commercial environment.

Dissipating the heat generated to prevent premature failure or process shutdown can be achieved by several means. The surface area of the enclosure itself may serve as a passive means to dissipate this heat, provided the ambient conditions are below the enclosure's interior temperature and the internal heat load does not cause an unacceptable rise in temperature. When this is not possible, an active approach is necessary. Open-loop powered ventilation or closed-loop cooling may be used.

Open-loop ventilation uses ambient air to remove the heat. This type of system may consist of small muffin-type fans that exhaust or supply an electrical enclosure, at times with filters to prevent airborne aerosols and dust from entering the enclosure. The fans have the advantage of utilizing a minimum amount of enclosure space and moving a substantial volume of air where flow is unimpeded. Cost and complexity are minimized.



Typical Special-Purpose Air Conditioner

A typical enclosure air conditioner is best suited for cooling applications subject to dust, dripping liquids, rain, wash-down and corrosive environments.

Where the density of components impedes airflow, packaged blowers or motorized impellers may be arranged to operate against these higher static pressures. With a rack enclosure, supplemental fan trays are a good option to spot cool or supplement other air-moving devices.



Motorized Impeller

If maximum internal enclosure design temperatures cannot be maintained using open-loop ambient air cooling, closed-loop devices should be considered. Air-to-air, water-to-air or thermoelectric heat exchangers and air-conditioners are able to cool a confined amount of air within an enclosure. Heat is transferred to the respective device's ambient side, where an air mover or water coil transfers the heat to the room or outdoors.

Air conditioners and water-to-air heat exchangers provide the greatest capacity to transfer heat in closed-loop conditions. They have the unique ability to maintain a lower-than-ambient temperature and reduce the humidity within the controlled space. It is important to note that enclosure design temperatures may exceed ambient temperatures yet be below the electronic components' design limits. Depending on the NEMA enclosure type, which designates the environmental hazard from which the contents are being protected, an air conditioner can be selected to operate in most locations.

Environments	NEMA 1	NEMA 12	NEMA 3R	NEMA 4	NEMA 4X
Indoor use only	✓	✓			
Indoor & outdoor use			✓	✓	✓
Falling liquids & light splashing		✓	✓	✓	✓
Non-hazardous dust, lint, fibers		✓		✓	✓
Washdowns & splashing water				✓	✓
Oil & coolant seepage		✓	✓	✓	✓
Corrosive agents					✓
Hazardous Location (Class I, Division 1 & 2)				✓	✓

Environmental conditions and associated NEMA ratings for enclosure cooling products including special-purpose air conditioners, fans, and heat exchangers.



Blog Post: "Everything You Need to Know About NEMA Ratings When Cooling an Enclosure"



A CLOSER LOOK

In a typical special-purpose air conditioner, heat is transferred from the enclosure components by circulating air around and through them. The air is then cooled, dehumidified, and returned to the enclosure without the admission of air from the outdoors. The heat is removed from this air within the air conditioner and discharged by means of a vapor compression refrigeration cycle. This takes place in a hermetically sealed system, utilizing either an air- or water-cooled condenser coil.

The compressor forces refrigerant, in vapor form, into the condenser coil, where it is cooled by ambient air. As it cools, the refrigerant condenses into a liquid that is passed through a filter to remove impurities and excess moisture. The liquid refrigerant flow is metered by a thermostatic expansion valve or capillary tube to control its admission to the evaporator coil, which is a part of the closed-loop inside the enclosure.

The refrigerant enters the evaporator as a liquid beginning to vaporize. As the blower or fan-driven heated air from the enclosure passes through the evaporator coil, the heat is transferred to the refrigerant, converting the refrigerant to vapor. High levels of humidity present in the air are removed by condensation; the water is drained to the outside and evaporated in some cases. The cool, dehumidified air is returned to the enclosure. After the heat is transferred to the refrigerant in the evaporator, the refrigerant passes into an accumulator, where any remaining liquid is separated. The gas then returns to the compressor to repeat the cycle in a continuous process.



The NEMA (National Electrical Manufacturers Association) rating signifies the air conditioner's ability to withstand certain environmental conditions, and should be matched to the enclosure being cooled. Examples include NEMA 12 (left), NEMA 4 (middle), and NEMA 4X (right).

Control of the system is generally kept simple. When power is applied to the air conditioner, the evaporator blower starts and runs continuously. If the temperature within the enclosure is high, the condenser blower and compressor turn on, operating until the thermostat setting is reached. The thermostat is used as a low-limit setting – typically 75°F (24°C) – serving as the point at which the compressor and condenser fans or blowers are turned off. The air within the enclosure continues to be circulated by the evaporator blower or fan, picking up heat from the components within the enclosure. The thermostat has a differential setting that is typically 12°F to 15°F (7°F to 8°C) above the low-limit setting. When the air circulated within the enclosure rises by this amount, or at about 90°F (32°C), the compressor and condenser blower turn back on, reducing the enclosure's internal air temperature once again. Therefore, at the startup of an enclosure system, it would be normal for the internal temperature to rise to this temperature before the refrigerated cooling would begin. As the air cools, a temperature balance within the enclosure is reached. Ideally, the compressor and condenser fan run most of the time until the heat load changes.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT MY ENCLOSURE AIR CONDITIONER

Enclosure cooling is not comfort cooling as found in homes and buildings. Heat-producing power and control components typically are limited to maximum enclosure air temperatures of 100°F to 110°F (38°C to 43°C). The actual component surface temperatures are even higher. On the other hand, maintaining enclosure temperatures too low often becomes problematic. Condensation may form on live electrical surfaces if their temperature falls below the dew point of the air. Subsequent corrosion or electrical safety become serious issues.

Various control features are available to operate in cooler ambient conditions found outdoors or in poorly heated settings. Compressor short cycling controls may be added to prevent damage caused by frequent starting when heat loads fluctuate.

[Enclosure air conditioners](#) typically carry agency markings such as UL (Underwriters Laboratories), which tests and certifies products for safety. The NEMA (National Electrical Manufacturers Association) rating signifies the air conditioner's ability to withstand certain environmental conditions, and should be matched to the enclosure or cabinet being cooled. Typical examples include NEMA 12 (indoor use, protection from dust and dripping liquids), NEMA 3R (outdoor use and rain-proof applications), and NEMA 4X (outdoor or indoor use, protection from wash-down and corrosive environments).

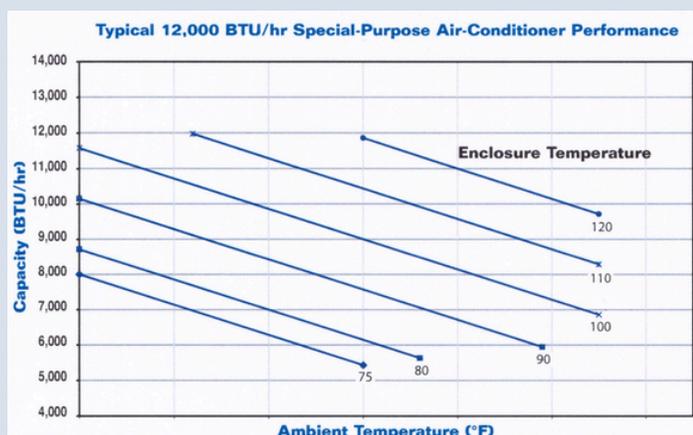


Blog Post: "What Makes an Enclosure Air Conditioner Unique?"



SIZING & SELECTION TIPS

Sizing calculations for an air conditioner can be accomplished using software available on manufacturers' websites (e.g. kooltronic.com/sizing). The internal heat load is determined based on measurement or estimation. Enclosure surface area, desired maximum internal enclosure temperature, degree of thermal insulation, if any, ambient temperature, and solar load (for outdoor use) are used to determine the total heat load in BTUs per hour. It is important to note that the solar load and the degree of insulation can become significant. A properly sized, well-designed system, free of refrigerant leaks and with a stable power supply will cool critical systems, trouble-free, for many years.



- ✓ Be sure not to oversize the unit.
- ✓ Be certain that both the evaporator and condenser airflow paths cannot short circuit or airflow are impeded.
- ✓ Be cautious of adding protective covers to the outside of the unit. This may reduce airflow and thermal performance.
- ✓ Seal the electrical enclosure to prevent humidity and outside air from entering.

Remember, dissipating the heat generated within various electrical enclosures helps prevent premature component failure or a process shutdown. To choose the most effective and economical solution, visit the [Kooltronic Enclosure Cooling Calculator](#) or contact one of Kooltronic's enclosure cooling specialists.



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