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It's that time of year again where the days are shorter and colder and our homes begin to dry out from turning on the heat. Winter is the driest time of year in NJ and can have a major effect on the health of your piano. There are ways to add humidity to your piano such as a room humidifier or a Damp-Chaser Life Saver system, which will be discussed in this newsletter. Whatever option you choose, I suggest doing something because even a new piano placed in a poorly regulated environment can be destroyed in a season.

There are some environmental conditions that must be avoided at all costs. The most detrimental situation you can find your piano in is if it is sitting directly over, under, or in front of a forced air heating vent. The dry air being blown at your piano will destroy it within one winter. It will crack any wooden parts that matter and it will loosen up the joints in the action to the point of being unplayable. Sitting next to a radiator or baseboard heater is just as bad and can cause loose tuning pins and a bright, harsh sound from the hammers. If you have your piano positioned directly next to your fireplace without adding humidity in any way when you have a fire going, you might as well just throw your piano in with the burning wood because it won't last long in such a place. I am finding that heated floors can also be monstrous to a piano because the heat radiates up underneath the piano and dries out the wood relentlessly. The best place for a piano is an inner alcove of your home away from windows, heating vents or radiators. If you have heated floors, an insulated mat for the piano to sit on would likely be helpful.



Besides helping your piano, an appropriately sized room humidifier has many other benefits to your health and the health of other objects in your home. It helps prevent dry skin, congestion, and static. **ALL PIANOS SHOULD HAVE A HYGROMETER ON OR NEXT TO THEM TO KEEP TRACK OF THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS EVEN IF YOU HAVE A WHOLE-HOUSE HUMIDIFIER INSTALLED ON YOUR FURNACE.** The best range for a piano is 40%-50% RH (relative humidity). To find the right size for your room, you must think cubically because water vapor is a gas. Humidifiers will have a square footage coverage area listed on their box; it will assume you have a standard 8 ft ceiling. This can be misleading because you may have a ceiling with a different height. If your home has an open flow pattern, you must also take into account that the humidifier will be working on the entire volume of all the rooms instead of just the piano room. If the room is small and you place the humidifier near the piano, make sure it is at least 3 ft away from the piano in any direction and not directly blowing toward the piano. **NEVER** put a room humidifier underneath your grand piano. If you are worried about aesthetics, there are humidifiers being made today that can be quite sleek and attractive, some even look like a wooden cabinet. Whether hot steam or cool mist, humidifiers are usually very quiet and some have a large enough water storage capacity that you may only need to fill them once a day. Follow the instructions for cleaning and maintaining your humidifier and you could be living in an especially comfortable and rejuvenating environment.

An alternative option specifically produced for pianos is the Piano Life Saver system made by The Damp-Chaser Corporation. This system includes humidifying and dehumidifying elements and a humidistat to effectively maintain the appropriate humidity level for your piano. The system must be plugged in and running 24/7 as even a day or two without power will alter the microclimate of your piano enough to disrupt the tuning and once it has been disrupted, turning the system back on will not bring it back in tune, only a piano tuner can do that. I have found that these systems work best for upright pianos because the entire inside of the piano including the action feels the benefits of the systems instead of just the soundboard as is found on a grand piano.

I suggest a room humidifier over a Damp-Chaser system because it has more benefits to the room beyond just maintaining the piano.