THERMAL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF A THIN DOMESTIC DIRECT EVAPORATIVE COOLING AIR CONDITIONING SYSTEM

Francisco Gontijo de Castro

Luiz Machado, luizm@demec.ufmg.br

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Departamento de Engenharia Mecânica, Avenida Antônio Carlos, 6627 – Pampulha/Belo Horizonte/MG/Brazil – CEP: 31270-901

Ricardo Nicolau Nassar Koury, koury@ufmg.br

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Departamento de Engenharia Mecânica, Avenida Antônio Carlos, 6627 – Pampulha/Belo Horizonte/MG/Brazil – CEP: 31270-901

Márcio Fonte-Boa Cortez, fonteboa@demec.ufmg.br

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Departamento de Engenharia Mecânica, Avenida Antônio Carlos, 6627 – Pampulha/Belo Horizonte/MG/Brazil – CEP: 31270-901

Abstract. Acclimatization devices by evaporative cooling increasingly conquer costumers, whereas they involve, generally, lower costs with energy and maintenance, in comparison with traditional wall air conditioners. Brazil is typical tropical country, where high annual average temperatures occur, leading to the need of the usage of an air conditioner, which is provided, almost completely, by mechanical compression refrigeration systems, instead of acclimatization devices by evaporative cooling. In many countries, this means of acclimatization is already employed in large scale. In this work, a study of an acclimatization system by evaporative cooling for domestic air conditioning is presented. The main motivation for this work was the search for a device with appropriate geometries for an environment esthetic integration; in other words, it's concentrated upon the performance evaluation of evaporative panels, manufactured in cellulose, with "harmonious looking". By "harmonious looking", it's understood, in this work, a device with reduced depth, in comparison with its height and width, resembling a blackboard shape. A mathematical model for the convective heat and mass transfer quantification between air and water in the "filling" of the panel is developed and plotted by computer. Through the computational simulations of operational configurations in counter-flow and crossed flow, from several conditions of air input, the thermal performances were calculated. The analysis of technical viability is focused upon the prediction of thermal efficiency (ratio between air temperature reduction and the maximum temperature reduction possible) of the panels as a function, among others, of its thickness, searching the minimal possible values for this dimension. Data about possible head losses through the filling of the panels were also calculated. The results showed a real possibility for the design of efficient evaporative coolers with the characteristics or geometrical features desired, in other words, comprised by thin panels.

Keywords: air conditioning, evaporative cooling, evaporative cooling pads, mathematical modeling, esthetics shapes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Brazil, as a typically tropical country, presents high annual average values of environment temperature, fact that makes often necessary the environment conditioning. Among the several acclimatization systems, there are those operating by *evaporative cooling*. These equipments involve, at first, lower costs of energy and maintenance than common wall conditioners. Unfortunately, in Brazil, the acclimatizators by evaporative cooling aren't widely employed yet, remaining unknown by the majority of population; on the other hand, they increasingly win space, whereas they present lower energy consume and maintenance costs than the conventional wall conditioners. Lower costs of acquisition and maintenance, together with demands of domestic acclimatization, could represent, for Brazilian population, a stimulus to the usage of evaporative coolers, particularly, in warm and dry zones of the country. Another interesting point concerns about humidification of environments, given the common weather conditions of low humidity (typical autumn/winter situation in Belo Horizonte), which can be, at first, done through the correct usage of the evaporative cooling, ensuring an appropriate range for humidity, accordingly with thermal comfort criteria.

Designs beholding esthetic features and low levels of noise would be basic in order to ensure a market of domestic acclimatization equipments. Models of evaporative coolers, available today, involve physical features that remind to the conventional wall conditioners. The main motivation of this work is the quest for an alternative of air conditioning, capable of reconcile energy economy and interesting esthetic looking for domestic usage. This study concentrates upon the thermal performance evaluation of evaporative panels manufactured in cellulose, for domestic usage, operating in counter-flow and crossed flow configurations, aiming for the maximum thickness reduction, in comparison with its width and height. Computational simulations, from a mathematical model for the quantification of convective heat and mass transfers between air and water in the "filling", make possible a preview of the operational and geometrical limits for an evaporative cooler as a function of the filling thickness.

2. MATHEMATICAL MODELING

The total heat transfer when environmental air gets in touch with water involve convective latent and sensitive exchanges, of which the measuring can be done through *enthalpy potential* (Stoecker and Jones, 1985). A thermal analysis of the process in steady-state condition for a generic control volume (Fig. 1) yields:

$$q_t = q_s + q_l = L c_{Pag}(T_{ae,s} - T_{ae,e}) = G.(h_{ar,s} - h_{ar,e}) = (h_c A / c_{pu})(h_l - h_a)$$
 (1)

being q_t the total heat transfer rate, q_s the sensitive heat transfer rate, q_l the latent heat transfer rate, h_c the coefficient of convective heat transfer, A the area of the water surface, c_{pu} (= c_{ps} + $\omega_a \cdot c_{pl}$) the specific heat of humid air, c_{ps} the specific heat of the dry air, c_{pl} the specific heat of the water steam, h_D (= h_c / c_{pu} .) the coefficient of convective mass transfer, h_i the enthalpy of saturated air at the water temperature, h_a the enthalpy of the air.

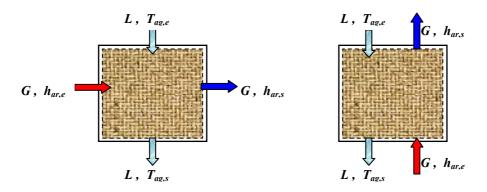


Figure 1. Control volume for an evaporative cooling system in cross-flow and counter-flow.

The value of h_cA/c_{pu} is hard to determine, from the convective heat and mass transfer coefficients point of view (of which evaluation is complex and, yet today, involve the study of many subjects not totally explored), as from the thermal exchange surface. Accordingly to Camargo et al (2003), evaporative panels is cellulose, manufactured by *Glacier-Cor* (Camargo, 2003), have a thermal exchange area by volume unit ratio of $400 \text{ m}^2/\text{m}^3$, value adopted in this work. For the calculation of heat and mass convective coefficients, it's adopted the Dowdy and Karabash correlation (1987), which yields the Nusselt number for an air flow through a cellulose evaporative panel:

$$Nu = 0.10 \left(\frac{l_e}{l}\right)^{0.12} \cdot \text{Re}^{0.8} \cdot \text{Pr}^{1/3}$$
 (2)

where l is the thickness of the evaporative panel and l_e is defined as the inverse of the ratio of the thermal exchange area by unit of volume.

Accordingly to Camargo et al. (2003), the velocities through the cellulose panel above are limited to 3.5m/s, which represents $Re \approx 550$. To respect these limits is fundamentally important, for not to provoke carrying of liquid particles of water by the air stream (*carry over*), for the environment to be acclimatized.

With concerns about the head loss through the evaporative panel, were adopted the data given by the manufacturer *Glacier-Cor*, for several velocities of the air and panel thickness.

The efficiency of an evaporative cooler is defined as the reduction of air temperature by the maximum reduction possible (Johnson et al., 2003), in other words, it's the difference between the input and output temperatures of dry bulb of the air in the cooler divided by the difference between the input temperatures of dry bulb and wet bulb of the air:

$$\eta = \frac{TBSe - TBSs}{TBSe - TBU} \tag{3}$$

The values of η are situated between 70 e 90 %.(ASHRAE, 1997). Camargo et al. (2003) developed the following formulation for the efficiency of an evaporative cooler:

$$\eta = 1 - exp\left(-\frac{h_c A / c_{Pu}}{\dot{m}_{ar}}\right) \tag{4}$$

where m_{ar} is the mass flow rate of air.

3. METHODOLOGY

First of all, simulations were made to evaluate the mathematical model and the computational algorithm, using, as reference, the work of Camargo et al. (2003). In the mathematical simulation, the same experimental values for the parameter $h_c A/c_{pu}$ were adopted, obtained by Camargo et al. (2003). The resultant efficiency values are compared with the data from the above authors.

Following this step, computational simulations were conducted, in order to make a comparison between the evaporative coolers operating in crossed flow and counter-flow configurations. For the operational counter-flow configuration, the cellulose panel was divided in 30 cells, which led to a one-dimensional problem. In the operational configuration of crossed flow, the mesh had 50 cells, being the analysis two-dimensional. From several psychrometric conditions of the environment air and different volume flow rates of water, values of $h_c A/c_{pu}$ that could make possible efficiencies of 75%, 85% e 90% were calculated.

The ulterior analyses were concentrated upon the determination of the dimensions of the evaporative panel, using as reference the efficiency of 85% and the necessary values of h_cA/c_{pu} . The present study was limited to the operational configuration of crossed flow, since the counter-flow configuration, due the disposition between the flows of water and air, would demand larger equipment and, thus, was ignored.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the validation of the analysis presented in this work, mathematical simulations were conducted, adopting the same experimental values to the parameter $h_c A/c_{pu}$, obtained by Camargo et al. (2003). The resulting efficiency values are compared with the data from the above authors, to which the results of this work showed good concordance (Table 1).

Table 1 – Efficiencies obtained by Camargo et al. (2003) and from the present work

Mass flow rate [kg/s]	Re	h_cA/c_{pu}	Camargo et al. (2003)	This work
0,203	153	0,424	87	88
0,233	178	0,427	86	84
0,297	226	0,518	80	83
0,419	322	0,687	75	81
0,458	353	0,738	74	80
0,480	370	0,767	73	79

In the comparison of the configurations of crossed flow and counter-flow, the flow rates of input air and recirculation water were kept constant at $1000 \text{ m}^3/\text{h}$ e 0.05 kg/s, respectively, for two psychrometric conditions of input air $TBS=36^{\circ}C/UR=60\%$ e $TBS=42^{\circ}C/UR=30\%$. For the same values of h_cA/c_{pu} , very similar thermal behaviors were observed between the two operational conditions (Table 2).

Table 2 – Comparative study between crossed flow and counter-flow configurations

CF	ROSSED FLOW			С	OUNTER-FLOV	٧
A	lir at 36 ℃ e Rel	ative Humidity of	f 6	60% - flow rate	e of 1000 m³/h	
$h_c A/c_{pu}$ kg/s	T output °C	η (%)		$h_c A/c_{pu}$ kg/s	T output °C	η (%)
0,275	32.1	56		0,275	32,1	56
0,550	30,4	81		0,550	30,4	81
0,602	30,2	84		0,602	30,2	83
1,203	29,2	98		1,203	29,2	97
A	lir at 42 ℃ e Rei	ative Humidity of	f 3	30% - flow rat	te of 1000 m³/h	
h_cA/c_{pu} kg/s	T output °C	η (%)		h_cA/c_{pu} kg/s	T output °C	η (%)
0,200	32,9	45		0,200	32,9	45
0,400	31,2	70		0,400	31,2	70
0,800	29,7	91		0,800	29,7	91
1,000	29,4	95		1,000	29,4	95

Similar thermal performance means different groups of geometry, filling and velocities, with its interactions, generating the same response for air acclimatization. Thus, all the following results refer only to coolers in crossed flow configuration.

Posterior computational essays were made to evaluation of recirculation water flow rate influence upon the cooler performance. It was considered, for the input air, $TBS=30^{\circ}C$ e $40^{\circ}C$, UR=25% e 70%, flow rate of $1000 \text{ m}^3/h$, and,

for the recirculation water, 0,05 kg/s e 0,5 kg/s. Thermal efficiency values were kept at 75%, 85%, 90%. It wasn't observed a significant influence of the recirculation water flow rate upon the thermal performance of the cooler. It's important to emphasize that, in the mathematical model proposed, thermal interactions of the water with external elements were not considered.

For the definition of the "esthetically" desired dimensions, panels of reduced thickness – objective of the present work, the following strategies were considered for the air flow in a crossed flow cooler (Fig. 2).

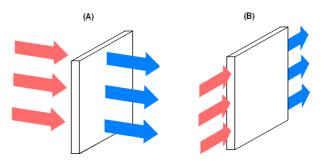


Figure 2. Different air array for a cross-flow direct evaporative cooler.

First, it was necessary to determine the values of $h_c A/c_{pu}$, for an efficiency of 85% and air flow rates of 1000 m^3/h , 2000 m^3/h e 3000 m^3/h , kept a recirculation water mass flow rate of 0,05 kg/s (Table 3).

Table 3 – $h_c A/c_{pu}$ required for an efficiency of 85%

Efficiency 85%					
Flow rate (m³/h)	$h_c A/c_{pu}$ (kg/s)				
1000	0,632				
2000	1,264				
3000	1,896				

Determined the value for parameter h_cA/c_{pu} corresponding to the kept flow rate, it's possible to establish a geometrical configuration for the panel, considering 3 widths, 10, 15 e 20 cm. The thickness of 20 cm was defined, by the purpose of the study, as maximum limit value. Results for the three input air flow rates are found in Table 4.

Table 4 – Geometrical dimensions for panels – efficiency of 85%. Configuration Fig. 2B.

		1	Air flow rate: 1000 m ³ /	h		
			Crossed Flow			
Width	Height	Length	Volume	Reynolds	hD (kg/m2.s)	h_cA/c_{pu}
20 cm	42,1 cm	23,8 cm	20000 cm ³	525	0,079	0,632 kg/s
15 cm	56,1 cm	23,8 cm	20000 cm ³	525	0,079	0,632 kg/s
10 cm	84,1 cm	23,8 cm	20000 cm ³	525	0,079	0,632 kg/s

			Air flow rate: 2000 m	³/h		
			Crossed Flow			
Width	Height	Length	Volume	Reynolds	hD (kg/m2.s)	h_cA/c_{pu}
20 cm	84,1 cm	23,8 cm	40000 cm ³	525	0,079	1,264 kg/s
15 cm	112,2 cm	23,8 cm	40000 cm ³	525	0,079	1,264 kg/s
10 cm	168,2 cm	23,8 cm	40000 cm ³	525	0,079	1,264 kg/s

			Air flow rate: 3000 m	³/h		
			Crossed Flow			
Width	Height	Length	Volume	Reynolds	hD (kg/m2.s)	h_cA/c_{pu}
20 cm	126,2 cm	23,8 cm	60000 cm ³	525	0,079	1,896 kg/s
15 cm	168,2 cm	23,8 cm	60000 cm3	525	0,079	1,896 kg/s
10 cm	252,3 cm	23,8 cm	60000 cm3	525	0,079	1,896 kg/s

For Re = 525, the air velocity is, approximately, 3,30 m/s, value that is close to the appropriate superior limit for the filling of cellulose, without bringing about the "carry over" of liquid particles of water. The number of Reynolds is influenced by the relation width x height, since these dimensions define the transversal section, through which the air flow passes, and, then, the velocity of the air.

With the widths and heights configured for Re = 525, the length of the panel was fitted for the appropriation to the value of h_cA/c_{pu} that would represent an efficiency of 85% (Table 4). It's observed that the values of length and volume of the evaporative panel are constant, despite the air flow rate or the width. This occurs, because, for the same Reynolds

number, the ratio between the straight section at the panel entry and the flow rate keep the same value. The velocity of the air for each configuration is also the same, causing the same value for the heat transfer coefficient and demanding the same length to reach a given efficiency.

For a given number of Reynolds and same efficiency, the height and the volume of the evaporative panel, just like the value of $h_c A/c_{pu}$ tend to grow linearly with the air flow rate. The dependence of the efficiency with the value of $h_c A/c_{pu}$, for different flow rates, can be seen in Fig 3.

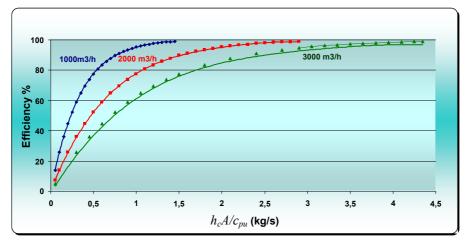


Figure 3 – Variation of efficiency with the value of h_cA/c_{pu} , for three air flow rates

It's important to emphasize that the effect of height variation is different from the influence of length variation upon the parameter h_cA/c_{pu} . The height and the width of the panel define the number of Reynolds, which is related, for its turn, to the value of h_cA/c_{pu} . Results for Re = 400, kept the efficiency of 85%, are found in Table 5.

Table 5 – Geometrical dimensions for Re = 400, efficiency of 85% - Configuration Fig. 2B.

		А	ir flow rate: 1000 m	1 ³ /h		
			Crossed Flow	V		
Width	Height	Length	Volume	Reynolds	hD (kg/m ² .s)	h_cA/c_{pu}
20 cm	55,2 cm	22,4 cm	24674 cm3	400	0,064	0,632 kg/s
15 cm	73,6 cm	22,4 cm	24674 cm3	400	0,064	0,632 kg/s
10 cm	110 4 cm	22 4 cm	24674 cm3	400	0.064	0.632 kg/s

			Air flow rate: 2000 i	m³/h		
			Crossed Flow	1		
Width	Height	Length	Volume	Reynolds	hD (kg/m².s)	h_cA/c_{pu}
20 cm	110,4 cm	22,4 cm	49349 cm3	400	0,064	1,264 kg/s
15 cm	147,2 cm	22,4 cm	49349 cm3	400	0,064	1,264 kg/s
10 cm	220,8 cm	22,4 cm	49349 cm3	400	0,064	1,264 kg/s

From Table 5, it can be observed that, for smaller numbers of Reynolds, the heights are bigger, in order to ensure an efficiency of 85%. Furthermore, with the reduction of the number of Reynolds, the necessary length to ensure an efficiency of 85% decline. The reduction of length, with the reduction of the number of Reynolds, shows that, in spite of the time in which water and air interact in the evaporative panel grows, the velocity has more significant influence upon the response of the cooler. A reduction of around 24% for the velocity (reduction of the number of Reynolds from 525 to 400) results in a reduction of just 6,2% for the length (approximately 0,9 cm).

Different values for the height and the length can be put together, with the objective of dimming the evaporative panel volume, without lose efficiency, in order to reduce financial costs of the equipment. The financial value of the evaporative panel is directly related with its volume. The volume of a panel with a number of Reynolds 400 presents a superior value by 23,3% than the volume for a Reynolds of 525.

Considering, now, the strategy for an air flow in a cooler of crossed flow represented in part A of Fig. 2, new results are found in Table 6.

			Air flow rate: 1000 m	³/h		
			Crossed Flow			
Width	Height	Length	Volume	Reynolds	h _D (kg/m².s)	h_cA/c_{pu}
42,4 cm	42,4 cm	20 cm	35955 cm ³	245	0,044	0,632 kg/s
80 cm	80,0 cm	15 cm	96000 cm ³	69	0,016	0,632 kg/s
195,0 cm	195,0 cm	10 cm	380250 cm ³	12	0,004	0,632 kg/s

			Air flow rate: 2000 n	n³/h		
			Crossed Flow			
Width	Height	Length	Volume	Reynolds	h _D (kg/m².s)	h_cA/c_{m}
60,0 cm	60,0 cm	20 cm	72000 cm ³	245	0,044	1,264 kg/s
113,0 cm	113,0 cm	15 cm	191535 cm ³	69	0,016	1,264 kg/s
275,5 cm	275,5 cm	10 cm	1759002 cm ³	12	0,004	1,264 kg/s

			Air flow rate: 3000 m	າ ³ /h		
			Crossed Flow			
Width	Height	Length	Volume	Reynolds	h _D (kg/m².s)	h_cA/c_{pu}
73,5 cm	73,5 cm	20 cm	108045 cm ³	245	0,044	1,896 kg/s
138,4 cm	138,4 cm	15 cm	287318 cm ³	69	0,016	1,896 kg/s
337,5 cm	337,5 cm	10 cm	11139062 cm ³	12	0,004	1,896 kg/s

Table 6 – Geometrical dimensions for panels – efficiency of 85%. Configuration Fig. 2A

The values for the length of the panel were limited between 10 e 20 cm, with the intention of making a comparison of the new results, based on an equivalent geometry, with the results obtained for the Fig. 2B configuration. A square air entry section was considered, since either composition between height and width values that produce the same area leads to similar responses.

Kept constant the length of the evaporative panel in 10 cm, for an efficiency of 85 %, the number of Reynolds results in a value lower than 550. For the length of 15 cm, the number of Reynolds becomes bigger than the established limit. However, for this case, if the width and height are increased in 10%, the number of Reynolds is situated inside the range considerated appropriate; yet the value of h_cA/c_{pu} is modified and the efficiency lightly increases.

The geometrical dimensions of the panels, obtained for operational strategies (A) or (B) from Fig. 2, are quite different. Configuration (A) has a similar shape of a square blackboard and with thicknesses of 10, 15 or 20 cm. Reminding that the relation between width x height of configuration (A) can be any, since the value of the straight section area is kept the same Configuration (B) has its physical feature seemed with a tower of constant straight section.

The decision for the choice between both configurations, (A) e (B), must consider, also, other factors, not beheld in this analysis: fans for air supply, water reservoir, pump, etc. The head loss through the panel has to be determined or measured, in order to define the ventilation system. Dimensions and distribution of the ventilators can be crucial for the definition of the final looking of the evaporative cooler.

Thus, it's presented, next, an estimate of the head loss in the configurations previously discussed.

For the calculations of the head loss through the evaporative panel, data yielded by the manufacturer *Glacier-Cor* (Fig. 4) were used and the results were generated for the operational configurations of crossed flow (Fig. 2). Simulations of head loss are presented in Tables 7 and 8, below.

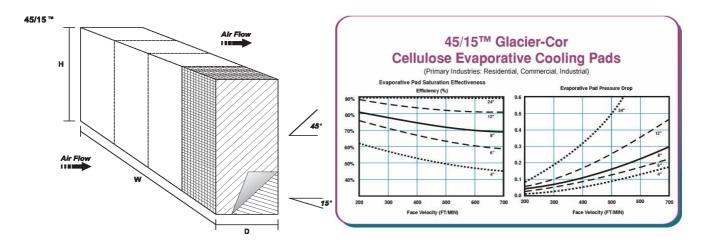


Figure 4 – Evaporative panel in cellulose 45/15TM from Glacier-Cor. Source: www.glacier-cor.com

Table 7 – Head losses through the panel – Efficiency of 85%. Configuration of Figure 2B.

		Air flo	w rate: 1000 m ³ /ł	1	
			Crossed Flow		
Width	Height	Length	Area	ΔΡ	
20 cm	42,1 cm	23,8 cm	841 cm ²	74,0 Pa	
15 cm	56,1 cm	23,8 cm	841 cm ²	74,0 Pa	
10 cm	84,1 cm	23,8 cm	841 cm ²	74,0 Pa	

Air flow rate: 2000 m³/h

			Crossed Flow		
Width	Height	Length	Area	ΔΡ	
20 cm	84,1 cm	23,8 cm	1682 cm ²	74,0 Pa	
15 cm	112,2 cm	23,8 cm	1682 cm ²	74,0 Pa	
10 cm	168,2 cm	23,8 cm	1682 cm ²	74,0 Pa	

Air flow rate: 3000 m³/h

			Crossed Flow		
Width	Height	Length	Area	ΔΡ	
20 cm	126,2 cm	23,8 cm	2523 cm ²	74,0 Pa	
15 cm	168,2 cm	23,8 cm	2523 cm ²	74,0 Pa	
10 cm	252,3 cm	23,8 cm	2523 cm ²	74,0 Pa	

Table 8 – Head losses through the panel – Efficiency of 85%. Configuration of Figure 2A.

		Air fle	ow rate: 1000 m3/h		
Crossed Flow					
Width	Height	Length	Area	ΔΡ	
42,4m	42,4 cm	20 cm	1798 cm ²	15,4 Pa	
80,0 cm	80,0 cm	15 cm	6400 cm ²	<4,5 Pa	
195,0 cm	195,0 cm	10 cm	38025 cm ²	<2 Pa	

Air flow rate: 2000 m3/h

			Crossed Flow		
Width	Height	Length	Area	ΔΡ	
60,0 cm	60,0 cm	20 cm	3600 cm ²	15,4 Pa	
113,0 cm	113,0 cm	15 cm	12769 cm ²	<4,5 Pa	
275,5 cm	275,5 cm	10 cm	175900 cm ²	<2 Pa	

Air flow rate: 3000 m3/h

Crossed Flow					
Width	Height	Length	Area	ΔP	
73,5 cm	73,5 cm	20 cm	5402 cm ²	15,4 Pa	
138,4 cm	138,4 cm	15 cm	19154 cm ²	<4,5 Pa	
337,5 cm	337,5 cm	10 cm	113906 cm ²	<2 Pa	

The values of head loss in the operational configuration represented in Fig. 2B remain the same, because the head loss is a function of the evaporative panel length and of the velocity (as easily observed in the data given by the manufacturer).

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study was dedicated to evaluate the thermal performance of evaporative coolers, with the intention of build them, from the geometrical point of view, with a quite different shape from the conventionally commercialized models. In other words, devices that could present a slim shape due its reduced thicknesses. To do that, a mathematical model for quantification of the convective heat transfers in the panel was computationally plotted, having in view obtaining results that could show a good thermal performance for evaporative coolers with the characteristics or geometrical features desired, as it is, comprised by thin panels.

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