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WOOD & STEEL



ROAD SHOW REV-UP

TAYLOR'S NEW IN-STORE EVENTS
ROLL OUT



water under the bridge:



Top: A sunken top indicates a severely dry guitar.

Photo by Rita Funk-Hoffman

Above: The soundhole pouch for the Planet Waves Humidipak, which holds two packettes. Photo by Tim Mantoani

It would be nice if we didn't have to worry about the effects of relative humidity (RH) on our acoustic guitars. After all, who isn't tempted to display a favorite guitar on a nearby stand or wall hanger for visual inspiration alone, ready at a moment's notice when those musical impulses strike?

But wood being wood, there's a potentially stiff penalty to be paid for pitting a solid-wood acoustic against the fickle force of RH, which can swing to troublesome extremes depending on regional climate, seasonal changes, and the use of heaters and air conditioning (both of which lower humidity levels substantially).

Depending on the conditions that surround your guitars, maintaining a healthy RH level — ideally about 45 to 55 percent — might require some extra care. In dry environments, guitar humidifiers such as a Dampit (a long tube with an encased sponge) are effective, but they

Taylor long ago assumed the role of humidification advocate because our repair department time and time again had seen the adverse effects of prolonged exposure to either dry or humid conditions (mostly dry) on our solid-wood guitars. It not only compromises both playability and sound, but can also lead to structural damage like cracking (on a dry guitar) if the problem is left unaddressed.

Our goal has been to help owners identify problematic symptoms early enough in the game to prevent more serious distress, and to provide useful information about reconditioning one's indoor environment to keep their Taylors in prime condition. (Several Tech Sheets on this subject are located on our website, at taylorguitars.com/guitars/reference/techsheets.html.)

Of course, the less complicated it is to maintain our guitars, the greater the likelihood that we'll do it.

Well, there's some good news on the humidification front. We're pleased to report the debut of a new product, D'Addario's Planet Waves™ Humidipak, an innovative development that will make it easier to maintain the health of your guitar. The Humidipak employs disposable, moisture-filled packettes that

Humidification Revisited

By Jim Kirlin

need to be properly wrung out to prevent water from dripping inside the guitar, and checked frequently to determine if they need to be re-moistened. (Extremely dry places like Colorado and Arizona can leave a Dampit bone-dry in as little as 24 hours.) To see how Dampits can be used to counter extra dry conditions, check out Bob Taylor's instructive video in our online video library (taylorguitars.com/see-hear), where Bob uses Dampits to bring a severely dry guitar back to its proper geometry.

Another humidifier that Taylor's repair techs have used with successful results is the Oasis (oasishumidifiers.com). The unit tends to be leak- and drip-proof, fits between the guitar strings without touching the body, and incorporates a special fabric that allows water vapor (but not liquid water) to be released. It actually can hold more water than a Dampit, and is arguably easier to use and monitor.

are engineered to maintain the relative humidity of a guitar within its case to a predetermined level of 45 percent (with an accuracy of plus/minus two percent). Incorporating patented technology, the Humidipak's breathable membrane actually provides two-way humidity control, meaning it can either release or absorb moisture to consistently maintain an RH of 45 percent.

Humidipak's technology found its breakthrough product application during the height of the cigar trend in the late '90s. It was embraced by premium cigar makers, who packaged their goods with Humidipak products (engineered to maintain an RH of 70 percent) to maintain the flavor and texture of their cigars. The technology has also been applied in other industries in which moisture control is crucial, including the shipping of perishable food products and the preservation of art.

Taylor has been working with Humidipak as a beta-test partner for more than a year now. Repair Department Manager Rob Magargal admits he was skeptical when he first heard of the product from Bob Taylor, but that quickly changed after he started running tests with dry guitars.

“Before that, we’d tried *everything*,” he says. “I thought if it wasn’t a Dampit or something like that, it wouldn’t work. I was really [pleasantly] surprised. If your guitar is really, really dry, you need something that will aggressively pump humidity into it, like a Dampit or Oasis. But once you get the guitar body back, then you use the Humidipak. It’ll maintain your guitar and your case, and then everything will be wonderful.”

The Humidipak kit includes three packettes and two pouches. The soundhole pouch is designed to house two packettes, and is draped over the strings so that both pouch compartments descend into the soundhole to maintain the RH of the guitar body. The headstock pouch, which holds the third packette, is placed beneath the headstock in the case, and helps maintain the neck. You can watch Bob Taylor demonstrate how the kit works in a video segment on the Taylor website.

Both Bob and Rob Magargal observed that, although the Humidipak works more slowly than a Dampit or Oasis humidifier, it’s the first device they’ve seen that actually brings moisture back to a dry fretboard in addition to the guitar body.

No harmful chemicals are used; it’s just salt and pure water, and only pure water vapor is allowed in and out of the packette. The packettes are designed to be tear- and puncture-resistant, and depending on how dry the conditions are, they should last from two to six months, after which they can simply be disposed of. A simple sign that it’s time for a new set is if the watery consistency of a packette begins to feel hard, like the texture of clay or putty.

Although the packettes will either absorb or release moisture, if you live in an especially humid climate, you’re better off using Humidipak’s high-absorption packettes, which have a greater absorption capacity than the standard ones.

Back at the dry end of the RH spectrum, Customer Service Supervisor Glen Wolff emphasizes that if your guitar is in a place where the relative humidity is substantially lower than optimal (25 percent or lower), you might still need to use a Dampit or Oasis unit in conjunction with the Humidipak to counter the dryness, and to prolong the life of your Humidipaks.

We also recommend that you buy a digital hygrometer. (Radio Shack and Extech each offer accurate models. Don’t buy



A third humidity control packette is inserted beneath the headstock in the guitar case. The Humidipak starter kit includes a pouch for this packette. Photo by Rita Funk-Hoffman

the analog kind with a needle, Wolff says; they’re much less accurate.) The Radio Shack model has both a main display unit and a remote hygro sensor, which will allow you to keep the main unit in the room at home where you typically play, and the remote sensor in the case with your guitar. Knowing the RH of the room will



help you accurately determine how much you might be putting your Taylor at risk if you leave it out on its stand for extended stretches.

Not only will the remote sensor wirelessly transmit the RH to the main unit (within a range of 100 feet), but you can add up to two more remote hygrosensors. This means you could monitor the RH levels in up to three guitar cases, plus the room, all from a single desktop unit.

It’s important to remember, though, that no matter how many Humidipaks you keep inside your guitar case, if your guitar is sitting out on a stand for prolonged periods, all you’ll have is a nicely humidified case.

Glen Wolff offers another tip.

“When you take your guitar out of your case to play, make sure you close the lid. Otherwise, you’ll lose some of the climate control.”

Although keeping one’s valued acoustics

healthy may require a little extra care, Magargal says that products like the Humidipak help simplify the process and deliver a completely tangible benefit.

“People want to play their Taylors and have them feel and sound great,” he says. “The reality is that we have to maintain them, like we have to get the oil changed in our cars. But at the same time, you don’t want to have to go out every single day and check every single thing on your car. That’s what I love about the Humidipak: it’s a no-brainer. If your guitar is in good condition already, you just leave your guitar in the case with the packettes and you’re done.”

For more information about the Humidipak, visit Humidipak.com/humidity or planetwaves.com. You can purchase them at most guitar shops and through Taylorware at taylorguitars.com. Retail list price is \$40.00 for the starter kit (which includes the two pouches and three packettes). A set of replacement packettes is \$10.00. ■

