

SELECTION OF HEAT EXCHANGERS

Heat Transfer Rate

This is the most important quantity in the selection of a heat exchanger. A heat exchanger should be capable of transferring heat at the specified rate in order to achieve the desired temperature change of the fluid at the specified mass flow rate.

Cost

Budgetary limitations usually play an important role in the selection of heat exchangers, except for some specialized cases where “money is no object.” An off-the-shelf heat exchanger has a definite cost advantage over those made to order. However, in some cases, none of the existing heat exchangers will do, and it may be necessary to undertake the expensive and time-consuming task of designing and manufacturing a heat exchanger from scratch to suit the needs. This is often the case when the heat exchanger is an integral part of the overall device to be manufactured.

The operation and maintenance costs of the heat exchanger are also important considerations in assessing the overall cost.

Pumping Power

In a heat exchanger, both fluids are usually forced to flow by pumps or fans that consume electrical power. The annual cost of electricity associated with the operation of the pumps and fans can be determined from

$$\text{Operating cost} = (\text{Pumping power, kW}) \times (\text{Hours of operation, h}) \times (\text{Price of electricity, \$/kWh})$$

where the pumping power is the total electrical power consumed by the motors of the pumps and fans. For example, a heat exchanger that involves a 1-hp pump and a 1-hp fan (1 hp = 0.746 kW) operating 8 h a day and 5 days a week will consume 2017 kWh of electricity per year, which will cost \$161.4 at an electricity cost of 8 cents/kWh.

Minimizing the pressure drop and the mass flow rate of the fluids will *minimize* the operating cost of the heat exchanger, but it will *maximize* the size of the heat exchanger and thus the initial cost. As a rule of thumb, doubling the mass flow rate will reduce the initial cost by *half* but will increase the pumping power requirements by a factor of roughly *eight*.

Typically, fluid velocities encountered in heat exchangers range between 0.7 and 7 m/s for liquids and between 3 and 30 m/s for gases. Low velocities are helpful in avoiding erosion, tube vibrations, and noise as well as pressure drop.

Size and Weight

Normally, the *smaller* and the *lighter* the heat exchanger, the better it is. This is especially the case in the *automotive* and *aerospace* industries, where size and weight requirements are most stringent. Also, a larger heat exchanger normally carries a higher price tag. The space available for the heat exchanger in some cases limits the length of the tubes that can be used.

Type

The type of heat exchanger to be selected depends primarily on the type of *fluids* involved, the *size* and *weight* limitations, and the presence of any *phase-change* processes. For example, a heat exchanger is suitable to cool a liquid by a gas if the surface area on the gas side is many times that on the liquid side. On the other hand, a plate or shell-and-tube heat exchanger is very suitable for cooling a liquid by another liquid.

Materials

The materials used in the construction of the heat exchanger may be an important consideration in the selection of heat exchangers. For example, the thermal and structural *stress effects* need not be considered at pressures below 15 atm or temperatures below 150°C. But these effects are major considerations above 70 atm or 550°C and seriously limit the acceptable materials of the heat exchanger.

A temperature difference of 50°C or more between the tubes and the shell will probably pose *differential thermal expansion* problems and needs to be considered. In the case of corrosive fluids, we may have to select expensive *corrosion-resistant* materials such as stainless steel or even titanium if we are not willing to replace low-cost heat exchangers frequently.

Other Considerations

There are other considerations in the selection of heat exchangers that may or may not be important, depending on the application. For example, being *leak-tight* is an important consideration when *toxic* or *expensive* fluids are involved. Ease of servicing, low maintenance cost, and safety and reliability are some other important considerations in the selection process. Quietness is one of the primary considerations in the selection of liquid-to-air heat exchangers used in heating and air-conditioning applications.