


Aircraft Environmental Systems

Bill Neese

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Table of Contents

Chapter One — Air Conditioning And Pressurization Systems	1
A. Terms and Definitions	1
B. Basic Requirements	3
C. Aircraft Air Conditioning Systems	3
1. Vapor-cycle Air Conditioning	3
a. Theory of Refrigeration	3
(1) Transfer of Heat	3
(2) Basic Vapor Cycle of Refrigeration	3
b. Components Of A Vapor-cycle Air Conditioning System	6
(1) Refrigerant	6
(2) Refrigeration Oil	8
(3) Receiver-dryer	8
(4) Thermal Expansion Valve	9
(a) Internally-equalized Thermal Expansion Valve	9
(b) Externally-equalized Expansion Valve	11
(5) Evaporator	11
(6) Compressor	11
(7) Condenser	12
(8) Service Valves	13
(a) Schrader Valves	13
(b) Compressor Isolation Service Valves	13
c. Service Equipment	14
(1) Manifold Set	14
(a) Low-side Gauge	14
(b) High-side Gauge	14
(c) Manifold	14
(d) Charging Hoses	15
(2) Refrigerant Source	15
(3) Vacuum Pump	16
(4) Leak Detector	16
d. System Servicing	17
(1) Tests and Inspection	17
(a) Visual Inspection	17
(b) Leak Test	17
(c) Performance Test	18
(d) Feel Test	18
(2) Purging The System	18
(3) Checking Compressor Oil	18
(4) Evacuating The System	19
(5) Charging The System	20
e. Description Of A Typical System	21

D. Vapor Cycle Systems	22
1. Subcooler	22
2. Major Components, Large Aircraft Vapor Cycle Systems	23
a. Air Turbine Compressor	23
b. Primary Heat Exchangers	23
c. Refrigeration Units	23
E. Types of Aircraft Heaters	23
1. Electric Heaters	23
a. Air Routing/Valves	25
2. Exhaust Shroud Heaters	25
3. Electric Heating Systems	26
4. Combustion Heaters	27
a. Combustion Air System	27
b. Fuel System	27
c. Ventilation Air System	27
d. Controls (Southwind 8240A)	27
e. Safety Features	28
(1) Duct Limit Switch	28
(2) Overheat Switch	28
f. Maintenance And Inspection	29
5. Compressor Bleed Air Heaters	30
F. Air-Cycle Air Conditioning	30
1. Cooling Systems	30
2. Air Cycle Cooling System	30
a. System Operation	30
3. Air Cycle System Component Operation	33
a. Primary Heat Exchanger	33
b. Primary Heat Exchanger Bypass Valve	33
c. Shutoff Valve	34
d. Refrigeration Bypass Valve	35
e. Secondary Heat Exchanger	36
f. Refrigeration Unit	36
g. Water Separators	37
h. Ram-Air Valve	37
4. Electronic Cabin Temperature Control System	37
a. Cabin Temperature Pickup Unit	38
b. Cabin Air Temperature Selector	38
c. Cabin Air Temperature Control Regulator	39
d. Typical System Operation	39
5. Electronic Temperature Control Regulator	39
G. Boeing 727 System	40
1. Air Conditioning	40
2. Pack Valves, Flow Control Valves, Pack Pressure	40
3. Flow Control Valves	40

4.	Air Conditioning Pack Operation	42
5.	Mix Valves	42
6.	Pack Temperature Indicator	42
7.	Pack Heat Exchanger Cooling	43
8.	Air Distribution	43
9.	Cabin Air Distribution	43
10.	Cockpit Air Distribution	43
11.	Gasper System	43
12.	Ram Air Ventilation	43
13.	Cabin and Cockpit Temperature Control	45
14.	Manual Temperature Control	45
15.	Aft Cabin Temperature Control - 200	45
16.	Equipment Cooling	45
17.	Pressurization - Pneumatic	45
18.	Automatic Pressure Controller	46
19.	Manual Pressure Controller	46
20.	Pressurization - Electronic	47
21.	Automatic Mode	47
22.	Standby Mode	47
23.	Manual Mode	47
24.	Cargo Heat Outflow Valve	47
25.	Aft Cargo Heat	47
H.	Boeing 767 System	48
1.	Environmental Control Systems	48
a.	Air Conditioning	48
b.	Heating	48
c.	Pressurization	48
d.	Equipment Cooling	48
2.	Environmental Control System (ECS) Supply	48
a.	Cooling Pack	48
b.	Recirculation System	48
c.	Gasper System	48
d.	Primary (Zone) Temperature Control System	48
e.	Cargo Heat	50
3.	Flow Control And Shutoff Valve	50
a.	General	50
b.	Ground Maintenance Requirements	50
4.	Heat Exchangers and Plenum	50
a.	Heat Exchangers	50
b.	Fan Air Plenum/Diffuser	50
5.	Air Cycle Machine	50
a.	General	50
6.	Water Extractor	53
a.	General	53
b.	Altitude Switch	53

7.	Low Limit Control Valve	53
a.	Physical Description	53
b.	Pneumatic Actuation	53
c.	Electrical Control	53
8.	Temperature Control Valve	53
a.	Physical Description	53
b.	Electrical Actuation	53
9.	Cooling Pack Sensors And Switches	57
a.	Pack Temperature Sensor	57
b.	Compressor Outlet Sensor	57
c.	Compressor Outlet Overheat Switch	57
d.	Pack Overheat Switch	57
e.	Pack Outlet Temperature Bulb	57
10.	Cooling Pack Flow Components	57
a.	Pack Flow Sensor	57
b.	Flow Sensor Signal Processor	57
11.	Cooling Pack Control Components	57
a.	Pack Temperature Controller	57
b.	Pack Standby Controller	59
c.	Flow Control Card	59
12.	RAM Air System	59
a.	RAM Air System	59
b.	Temperature Control Card	59
c.	Water Spray Nozzle	59
13.	Recirculation System	59
a.	Recirculation Fan	59
b.	Recirculation Air Filter	59
c.	Recirculation Air Check Valve	59
d.	Fan Current Sensors	59
e.	ECS Fan Control Card	59
14.	Main Distribution Manifold	59
a.	General	59
b.	Mix Manifold	60
c.	Ground Air Service Connector	60
15.	Primary (Zone) Temperature Control System	60
16.	Zone Temperature Components	60
a.	Zone Temperature Controller	60
b.	Trim Air Supply Check Valves	60
Chapter Two — Aircraft Cabin Atmospheric Control Systems		61
A.	Cabin Pressurization Systems	61
1.	Physiology Of Flight	61
a.	The Atmosphere	61
b.	Human Respiration And Circulation	61
(1)	Hypoxia, Anoxia	63
(2)	Hyperventilation	63
(3)	Carbon Monoxide Poisoning	64

B. Aircraft Pressurization Systems	64
1. Pressure Of The Atmosphere	64
2. Temperature And Altitude	64
3. Pressurization Problems	64
4. Sources Of Pressurizing Air	65
a. Reciprocating Engine Aircraft	65
b. Turbine Engine Aircraft	66
5. Control Of Cabin Pressure	66
a. Pressurization Cockpit Controls	66
b. Cabin Air Pressure Regulator And Outflow Valve Operation	68
c. Cabin Air Pressure Safety Valve Operation	70
d. Air Distribution	71
e. Cabin Pressurization Troubleshooting	71
C. Boeing 727 System	71
1. Pressurization - Pneumatic	71
2. Automatic Pressure Controller	73
3. Manual Pressure Controller	73
4. Pressurization - Electronic	73
5. Automatic Mode	73
6. Standby Mode	74
7. Manual Mode	74
8. Cargo Heat Outflow Valve	74
9. Aft Cargo Heat	74
D. Boeing 767 System	74
1. Pressurization System	74
2. Cabin Pressurization Control Systems	74
a. Pressurization Control Systems	74
3. Cabin Pressure Control (AUTO)	76
a. Operation - Control	76
b. AUTO FAIL Light	77
c. LOW INFLOW Indication	77
d. High Altitude	77
e. Valve Position Indicator	77
f. Tie-Breaker	77
4. Cabin Pressure Control (Manual)	77
a. Manual Mode	77
5. Cabin Pressure Controller	77
a. Built-In-Test-Equipment (BITE) (Fault Monitoring)	77
6. Cabin Pressurization Control Backup Systems	77
a. Positive Pressure Relief	77
b. Negative Pressure Relief	77
7. Cabin Altitude Warning System	78
a. Cabin Altitude Warning System	78
b. Altitude Switch	78
c. Pressure Indication	78
d. Altitude Warning System	78

Chapter Three — Aircraft Oxygen Systems	79
A. Need For Oxygen	79
B. Composition Of The Atmosphere	79
1. Pressure Of The Atmosphere	80
2. Temperature And Altitude	80
C. Characteristics Of Oxygen	81
D. Forms of Oxygen	82
1. Gaseous Oxygen	82
2. Liquid Oxygen	82
3. Chemical, Or Solid, Oxygen	82
4. Mechanically-separated Oxygen	83
E. Oxygen Systems And Components	83
1. Gaseous Oxygen Systems	83
a. Storage Cylinders	83
(1) Low-pressure Cylinders	83
(2) High-pressure Cylinders	83
b. Regulators	83
(1) Continuous Flow Regulators	84
(a) Manual Continuous Flow Regulator	84
(b) Automatic Continuous Flow Regulator	84
(c) Demand Regulators	84
(d) Diluter Demand Regulators	84
(e) Pressure Demand Regulators	86
c. Masks	86
(1) Continuous Flow Masks	86
(2) Demand-type Masks	87
d. Plumbing And Valves	87
e. Typical Installed Oxygen Systems	87
(1) Continuous Flow Systems	87
(2) Diluter Demand System For Crew, With Continuous Flow System For Passengers	89
(3) Pressure Demand Systems	90
(a) Liquid Oxygen Systems	90
(b) Chemical Oxygen Systems	90
F. Oxygen System Servicing	91
1. Servicing Gaseous Oxygen Systems	92
a. Leak Testing Gaseous Oxygen Systems	92
b. Draining The Oxygen System	92
c. Cleaning The Oxygen System	92
d. Cleaning Compound, Oxygen System	93
e. Filling An Oxygen System	93
f. Purging The Oxygen System	94
g. Oxygen System Inspection And Maintenance	95
h. Purging A Gaseous Oxygen System	95

(1) Filling A Liquid Oxygen System	95
(2) Inspecting The Masks And Hoses	96
(3) Replacing Tubing, Valves And Fittings	96
i. Prevention Of Oxygen Fires Or Explosions	96
(1) Oxygen System Inspection And Maintenance Practices	97
G. Boeing 727 Oxygen System	97
1. Flight Crew Oxygen	97
2. Smoke Goggles	97
3. Passenger Oxygen	97
4. Flight Crew Portable Oxygen	99
5. Passenger Portable Oxygen	99
6. Scott Portable Oxygen Bottle	99
7. Cabin Oxygen System	99
a. Passenger Mask Outlet Valves	99
b. Plunger Valve	99
c. PSU Pressure Latch Valve Manifold Assembly	99
8. Quick Donning Oxygen Masks	99
a. Puritan Mask	99
b. Donning	100
H. Boeing 767 Oxygen System	100
1. Passenger System Latch Mechanism	100
a. Aneroid - (14000')	100
b. Passenger System Latch Mechanism	100
2. Passenger Oxygen System	100
3. Crew Oxygen Mask/Regulator	100
a. Stowage	100
b. Pneumatic Harness	100
c. Regulator Controls	103
d. "In-Place" Check Out	103
4. Crew Oxygen Cylinder	103
5. Crewmembers Oxygen System	103
6. Oxygen Systems	103
Chapter Four — Ice And Rain Control Systems	105
A. Ice Control Systems	105
1. General	105
a. Icing Effects	105
b. Ice Prevention	105
2. Pneumatic Deicing Systems	106
3. Anti-icing Systems	107
a. Thermal Anti-icing Systems	107
(1) Thermal Anti-Icing	109
(2) Anti-Icing Using Combustion Heaters	110
(3) Anti-icing Using Exhaust Heaters	110
(4) Anti-Icing Using Engine Bleed Air	112
b. Pneumatic System Ducting	113

c.	Electric Anti-Icing	113
d.	Chemical Anti-Icing	115
4.	Deicing Systems	116
a.	Rubber Deicer Boot System	116
(1)	Principle Of Operation	117
(2)	Source Of Operating Air	118
(3)	Deicing System Components (typical)	118
(4)	Construction And Installation Of Deicer Boots	119
b.	Pneumatic System Operation	120
c.	Deicing System Components	120
(1)	Engine-Driven Air Pump	120
(2)	Safety Valves	123
(3)	Oil Separator	123
(4)	Combination Regulator, Unloading Valve, And Oil Separator	123
(5)	Suction Regulating Valve	124
(6)	Solenoid Distributor Valve	124
(7)	Electronic Timer	124
d.	Pneumatic Deicing System Maintenance	124
(1)	Operational Checks	124
(2)	Inspection, Maintenance, And Troubleshooting Of Rubber Deicer Boot Systems	125
(a)	Electrothermal Propeller Deicing	125
e.	Ground Deicing Of Aircraft	125
(1)	Frost Removal	126
(2)	Ice And Snow Removal	127
f.	Windshield Icing Control Systems	128
(1)	Window Defrost System	129
(2)	Windshield And Carburetor Alcohol Deicing Systems	130
(3)	Pitot Tube Anti-Icing	130
g.	Water And Toilet Drain Heaters	130
h.	Rain Eliminating Systems	130
(1)	Electrical Windshield Wiper Systems	130
(2)	Hydraulic Windshield Wiper Systems	133
(3)	Pneumatic Rain Removal Systems	134
(4)	Windshield Rain Repellant	134
i.	Maintenance Of Rain Eliminating Systems	136
(1)	Windshield Wiper Systems	136
(2)	Pneumatic (Jet Blast) Systems	136
B.	Boeing 727	136
1.	Ice And Rain Protection	136
a.	Anti-Icing	136
b.	Engine Anti-Ice	136
(1)	Engine Anti-Ice Controls	136
(2)	Engine Inlet Anti-Ice	137
(3)	Engine 1 And 3 Cowl Anti-Ice	137
(4)	Engine 2 Cowl Anti-Ice	137

c.	Wing Anti-Ice	137
(1)	Controls And Indicators	137
(2)	Wing Anti-Ice Overheat	138
(3)	APU Isolation Valves	138
(4)	Wing Anti-Ice Autotrip System	138
d.	Windows And Window Heat	138
(1)	Window Heat - 200	138
(2)	Overheat	139
(3)	Test Switch	139
(4)	Windows 4 And 5	139
(5)	Window Heat - 100	139
(6)	Overheat	139
e.	Pitot Heat	139
f.	Windshield Wipers	140
g.	Rain Repellent	140
4.	Abnormal And Emergency Discussion	140
a.	Cockpit Window Failures And Overheat	140
(1)	Procedure	140
(a)	Arcing Or Cracking	140
b.	Pitot Static System	140
(1)	Failures	141
C.	Boeing 767	141
1.	Ice And Rain Protection	141
a.	Ice Protection	141
b.	Rain Protection	141
2.	Anti-Iced Areas	141
a.	Wing Thermal Anti-Icing	141
b.	Engine Nose Cowl Thermal Anti-Icing	141
c.	Probe Anti-Icing	141
3.	Anti-Iced Areas/Rain Protection	141
a.	Flight Compartment Window Anti-Icing	141
b.	Windshield Wiper System	141
c.	Rain Repellent System	141
d.	Water And Drain Line Heaters	141
4.	Wing Anti-Ice Components	145
a.	Wing Anti-Ice Components	145
b.	Wing Overheat Switch	145
c.	Pressure Switch	145
d.	Telescoping Duct	145
e.	Flexible Coupling And Spray Tubes	145
5.	Nose Cowl Anti-Icing	145
a.	Electrical Functional Description	145
b.	Pneumatic Functional Description	145
6.	Nose Cowl Components	145
a.	Nose Cowl Thermal Anti-Icing Valves	145
b.	Cowl Thermal Anti-Ice Pressure Switch	145

7. Probe Anti-Icing	145
a. Pitot Static Probes	145
b. Angle of Attack Probes (AOA)	145
c. Total Air Temperature Probe	145
8. Ice Detector	145
a. General	145
b. Component Detail	146
c. Operation	146
9. Window Heat Control Unit	146
10. Controller Test	146
a. Flight Compartment Test Switch	146
b. BITE Test	146
11. Windshield Wiper Schematic	146
a. Electrical Functional Description	146
b. Control	146
12. Rain Repellent System	147
a. Functional Description	147
b. Control	147
c. Repellent Bottle Replacement	147
13. Water Tank And Mast Heaters	147
a. Drain Mast Heater	147
b. Potable Water Tank Heater	147
c. Line Heaters	147
14. Water And Waste System Heaters	147
a. Heater Tapes	147
b. Drain Pipe And Water Service Heaters	147
Chapter Five — Fire Protection Systems	149
A. Principles Of Fire Protection Systems	149
1. Classes Of Fires	149
2. Requirements For Overheat And Fire Protection Systems	149
B. Fire Detection/Overheat Systems	150
1. Thermal Switch Fire Detection System	151
2. Thermocouple-type Fire Detection System	152
3. Continuous Loop Fire Detection System	153
a. Fenwall System	153
b. Kidde System	153
4. Pressure-type Sensor Responder Fire Detection System	154
a. Lindberg System	154
b. Systron-Donner System	154
5. Fire Zones	155
C. Smoke And Toxic Gas Detection System	155
1. Carbon Monoxide Detectors	156
2. Smoke Detectors	156
a. Light Refraction Type	156

b. Ionization Type	156
c. Solid-state Type	157
3. Flame Detectors	157
D. Extinguishing Agents -Portable Fire Extinguishers	157
1. Halogenated Hydrocarbons	157
2. Inert Cold Gases	158
3. Dry Powder	158
4. Water	158
5. Class D Fires	158
6. Cockpit And Cabin Interiors	158
a. Extinguisher Types	158
b. Extinguishers Unsuitable As Cabin Or Cockpit Equipment	159
E. Installed Fire Extinguishing Systems	159
1. Carbon Dioxide	159
2. Halogenated Hydrocarbons	160
F. Fire Detection System Maintenance Practices	161
G. Fire Detection System Troubleshooting	163
H. Fire Extinguisher System Maintenance Practices	163
1. Container Pressure Check	163
2. Discharge Cartridges	163
3. Agent Containers	164
I. Fire Prevention Practices	166
J. Boeing 767 Systems	172
1. Detection	172
a. Engines	172
b. APU	172
c. Lower Cargo Compartment Smoke Detection	172
2. Extinguishing	172
a. Engines	172
b. APU	172
c. Cargo Compartments	173
d. Portable Units	173
3. Engine Fire And Overheat Detection	173
a. Components	173
(1) Fire Control Panel	173
(2) Fuel Control Switch Module	173
(3) Discrete Warning Display	173
(4) Fire/Ovht Test Module	173
(5) EICAS Display Units	173
(6) Fire Detection Card File (P54)	173
(7) Warning Electronics Unit (P51)	175
4. Fire And Overheat Alarm Systems	175
a. Fire Alarms	175
b. Overheat Alarms	175
c. Test	175

5.	Functional Data Flow	175
a.	Power	175
(1)	Signal Processing	175
b.	Alarm Flow	175
(1)	Fire	175
(2)	Overheat	175
c.	Test	175
6.	Fire Switch Unlock	176
a.	Unlock	176
7.	Engine Fire Extinguishing System	176
a.	Components	176
b.	Operation	176
c.	Squibs	176
d.	Ground Checkout	176
e.	APU Fire Detection System	176
8.	APU Fire Extinguishing System	176
a.	Fire Extinguishing	176
(1)	Squibs Test	176
(2)	Pressure Switch Test	179
9.	Wheelwell Fire Detection	179
a.	General Description	179
b.	Wheelwell Detector Element	179
c.	Duct Leak And Wheelwell Fire Card	179
d.	Wheelwell Fire Test	179
10.	Wheelwell Fire Detection	179
a.	Functional Description	179
b.	Control	179
11.	Fire And Overheat Protection	179
a.	Duct Overheat	179
b.	Cargo Compartment Fire Protection	179
c.	Cargo Compartment Fire Extinguishing	179
d.	Pressure Switch Ground Checkout	179
e.	Wing And Body Duct Leak Detection	181
f.	Duct Leak Detection Sensor	181
g.	Duct Leak And Wheel Well Overheat Card	181
h.	Air Supply Panel (P5)	181
i.	Right Side Panel (P61)	181
12.	Cargo Compartment Smoke Detection Systems	181
a.	Lower Cargo Compartment Smoke Detection	181
13.	Cargo Compartment Fire Extinguishing	181
a.	Bottles	181
b.	Nozzles	181
c.	Control	181

Chapter One

Air Conditioning And Pressurization Systems

The cabin air conditioning and pressurization system supplies conditioned air for heating and cooling the cockpit and cabin spaces. This air also provides pressurization to maintain a safe, comfortable cabin environment. In addition to cabin air conditioning, some aircraft equipment and equipment compartments require air conditioning to prevent heat buildup and consequent damage to the equipment.

Some of the air conditioning systems installed in modern aircraft utilize air turbine refrigerating units to supply cooled air. These are called air cycle systems. Other modern aircraft utilize a compressed gas cooling system. The refrigerating unit is a freon type, quite similar in operation to a common household refrigerator. Systems utilizing this refrigeration principle are called vapor cycle systems.

A. Terms and Definitions

The system which maintains cabin air temperatures is the air conditioning system. The sources of heat which make cabin air conditioning necessary are: (1) Ram-air temperature, (2) engine heat, (3) solar heat, (4) electrical heat, and (5) body heat.

It is necessary to become familiar with some terms and definitions to understand the operating principles of pressurization and air conditioning systems. These are:

- (1) *Absolute pressure*. Pressure measured along a scale which has zero value at a complete vacuum.
- (2) *Absolute temperature*. Temperature measured along a scale which has zero value at that point where there is no molecular motion (-273.1°C . or -459.6°F .).
- (3) *Adiabatic*. A word meaning no transfer of heat. The adiabatic process is one in which no heat is transferred between the working substance and any outside source.
- (4) *Air Conditioning*. The artificial treatment of air to make living conditions more comfortable.
- (5) *Aircraft altitude*. The actual height above sea level at which an aircraft is flying.
- (6) *Ambient temperature*. The temperature in the area immediately surrounding the object under discussion.
- (7) *Ambient pressure*. The pressure in the area immediately surrounding the object under discussion.
- (8) *Boiling Point*. The temperature at which a liquid changes to a vapor.
- (9) *British Thermal Unit (BTU)*. the amount of heat required to raise one pound of water one degree Fahrenheit.
- (10) *Cabin altitude*. Used to express cabin pressure in terms of equivalent altitude above sea level.
- (11) *Calorie*. The amount of heat required to raise one gram of water one degree Celsius (Centigrade).
- (12) *Capillary Tube*. A small tube with a definite inside diameter and length used to meter a fluid.
- (13) *Cold*. Absence of heat.
- (14) *Condensation*. The changing of a vapor to a liquid.
- (15) *Desiccant*. A material used to absorb moisture.
- (16) *Differential pressure*. The difference in pressure between the pressure acting on one side of a wall and the pressure acting on the other side of the wall. In aircraft air conditioning and pressurizing systems, it is the difference between cabin pressure and atmospheric pressure.

- (17) *Evaporate*. The changing of a liquid into a vapor.
- (18) *Gage pressure*. A measure of the pressure in a vessel, container, or line, as compared to ambient pressure.
- (19) *Heat*. A form of energy whose effect is produced by accelerated molecular motion.
- (20) *Heat Load*. The amount of heat the air conditioner is required to remove.
- (21) *Latent Heat*. The quantity of heat absorbed or released by a substance undergoing a change of state without a change in temperature.
- (22) *Latent Heat of Evaporation*. The quantity of heat absorbed by a substance changing from a liquid to a vapor.
- (23) *Latent Heat of Condensation*. The quantity of heat given off when a substance changes from a vapor to a liquid.
- (24) *Latent Heat of Fusion*. The quantity of heat removed from a substance to change it from a liquid to a solid without changing its temperature.
- (25) *Liquid*. A fluid which will assume the shape of the container in which it is held but will not expand to completely fill the container.
- (26) *Phosgene*. A colorless gas with an unpleasant odor which is produced when Refrigerant 12 is passed through an open flame. It causes severe respiratory irritation.
- (27) *Ram-air temperature rise*. The increase in temperature created by the ram compression on the surface of an aircraft traveling at a high rate of speed through the atmosphere. The rate of increase is proportional to the square of the speed of the object.
- (28) *Reed Valve*. Thin leaf type valves located in the valve plate of a reciprocating compressor to control the inlet and outlet of the refrigerant.
- (29) *Refrigerant*. A fluid which is used in an air conditioning system to absorb heat from the cabin and carry it outside the airplane where it can be transferred to the outside air.
- (30) *Refrigerant 12*. Dichlorodifluoromethane, a chemical compound used in most aircraft air conditioning systems. Refrigerant 134a is the latest type developed.
- (31) *Relative Humidity*. The ratio of the amount of water vapor in the air to the amount of water vapor required to saturate the air at the existing temperature.
- (32) *Saturated Vapor*. The condition of the vapor above a liquid in which no further vaporization can take place without an increase in its temperature.
- (33) *Sensible Heat*. Heat added to a substance which causes a change in the temperature of the substance.
- (34) *Specific Heat*. The amount of heat required to raise the temperature of a pound of substance one degree Fahrenheit.
- (35) *Standard barometric pressure*. The weight of gases in the atmosphere sufficient to hold up a column of mercury 760 millimeters high (approximately 30 in.) at sea level (14.7 p.s.i.). This pressure decreases with altitude.
- (36) *Super Heat*. Heat energy added to a gas after evaporation has been completed.
- (37) *Superheated Vapor*. Vapor which has been heated above its boiling point for a given pressure.
- (38) *Temperature scales*.
- (a) *Centigrade*. A scale on which 0°C. represents the freezing point of water, and 100°C. is equivalent to the boiling point of water at sea level.
- (b) *Fahrenheit*. A scale on which 32°F. represents the freezing point of water, and 212°F. is equivalent to the boiling point of water at sea level.
- (39) *Thermostat*. An air conditioning control which senses the temperature of the evaporator coil and causes the system to cycle to maintain the proper temperature of the cooling air.
- (40) *Ton of Refrigeration*. A measure of the cooling capacity of an air conditioning system. It has the same cooling effect as would be had by melting one ton of ice in 24 hours. It is equal to 12,000 BTU of heat energy absorbed in one hour.
- (41) *Vapor Pressure*. The pressure exerted by the vapor above a liquid which prevents the release of additional vapor at any specific temperature.

B. Basic Requirements

Five basic requirements for the successful functioning of a cabin pressurization and air conditioning system are:

- (1) A source of compressed air for pressurization and ventilation. Cabin pressurization sources can be either engine-driven compressors, independent cabin superchargers, or air bled directly from the compressor section of a gas turbine engine.
- (2) A means of controlling cabin pressure by regulating the outflow of air from the cabin. This is accomplished by a cabin pressure regulator and an outflow valve.
- (3) A method of limiting the maximum pressure differential to which the cabin pressurized area will be subjected. Pressure relief valves, negative (vacuum) relief valves, and dump valves are used to accomplish this.
- (4) A means of regulating (in most cases cooling) the temperature of the air being distributed to the pressurized section of the airplane. This is accomplished by the refrigeration system, heat exchangers, control valves, electrical heating elements, and a cabin temperature control system.
- (5) The sections of the aircraft which are to be pressurized must be sealed to reduce inadvertent leakage of air to a minimum. This area must also be capable of safely withstanding the maximum pressure differential between cabin and atmosphere to which it will be subjected.

Designing the cabin to withstand the pressure differential and hold leakage of air within the limits of the pressurization system is primarily an airframe engineering and manufacturing problem.

In addition to the components just discussed, various valves, controls, and allied units are necessary to complete a cabin pressurizing and air conditioning system. When auxiliary systems such as windshield rain-clearing devices, pressurized fuel tanks, and pressurized hydraulic tanks are required, additional shutoff valves and control units are necessary. Figure 1-1 shows a schematic diagram of a pressurization and air conditioning system. The exact details of this system are peculiar to only one model of aircraft, but the general concept is similar to that found in the majority of aircraft.

C. Aircraft Air Conditioning Systems

We have become accustomed to thinking of air conditioning as the cooling of air, but actually it means much more than just this. A complete air-conditioning system for an aircraft should control both the temperature and humidity of the air, heating or cooling it as is necessary. It should provide adequate movement of the air for ventilation, and there should be provision for the removal of cabin odors.

1. Vapor-cycle Air Conditioning

a. Theory of Refrigeration

The vapor-cycle air-conditioning system operates on the same refrigeration cycle as the mechanical refrigeration we use to cool our food and water. A refrigerant changes its state from a liquid into a vapor, and in doing so, it absorbs heat from the cabin. This heat is taken outside of the aircraft and is given off to the outside air as the refrigerant returns to its liquid state.

(1) Transfer of Heat

Heat, we must remember, is a form of energy, and we have neither the prerogative to create nor destroy energy. We can, however, transform it, or move it from one place or material to another. This energy continues to exist regardless of its form or location.

Heat will flow from an object having a certain level of energy into an object having a lower level. And any material that allows this transfer easily is said to be a conductor of heat, while any material that blocks or impedes the transfer is called an insulator.

The refrigerant used in an aircraft air-conditioning system is a liquid under certain conditions, but when it is surrounded by air having a higher level of heat energy, heat will flow from the air into the liquid. As the liquid absorbs the heat it will change its state and become a gas. The air that give up its heat to the refrigerant is cooled.

(2) Basic Vapor Cycle of Refrigeration

Heat is a form of energy that manifests itself in the molecular movement within a material. If there were no heat, there would be no molecular motion. When heat is added to a material, its molecular movement increases, and the material even increases in physical size. This is called thermal expansion.