HEAT EXCHANGER

A heat exchanger is a device that is used to transfer thermal energy (enthalpy) between two or more fluids, between a solid surface and a fluid, or between solid particulates and a fluid, at different temperatures and in thermal contact. In heat exchangers, there are usually no external heat and work interactions. Typical applications involve heating or cooling of a fluid stream of concern and evaporation or condensation of single- or multicomponent fluid streams. In other applications, the objective may be to recover or reject heat, or sterilize, pasteurize, fractionate, distill, concentrate, crystallize, or control a process fluid.

In a few heat exchangers, the fluids exchanging heat are in direct contact. In most heat exchangers, heat transfer between fluids takes place through a separating wall or into and out of a wall in a transient manner. In many heat exchangers, the fluids are separated by a heat transfer surface, and ideally they do not mix or leak. Such exchangers are referred to as direct transfer type, or simply recuperators. In contrast, exchangers in which there is intermittent heat exchange between the hot and cold fluids—via thermal energy storage and release through the exchanger surface or matrix—are referred to as indirect transfer type, or simply regenerators. Such exchangers usually have fluid leakage from one fluid stream to the other, due to pressure differences and matrix rotation/valve switching. Common examples of heat exchangers are shell-and tube exchangers, automobile radiators, condensers, evaporators, air preheaters, and cooling towers.

If no phase change occurs in any of the fluids in the exchanger, it is sometimes referred to as a sensible heat exchanger. There could be internal thermal energy sources in the exchangers, such as in electric heaters and nuclear fuel elements. Combustion and chemical reaction may take place within the exchanger, such as in boilers, fired heaters, and fluidized-bed exchangers. Mechanical devices may be used in some exchangers such as in scraped surface exchangers, agitated vessels, and stirred tank reactors. Heat transfer in the separating wall of a recuperator generally takes place by conduction. However, in a heat pipe heat exchanger, the heat pipe not only acts as a separating wall, but also facilitates the transfer of heat by condensation, evaporation, and conduction of the working fluid inside the heat pipe. In general, if the fluids are immiscible, the separating wall may be eliminated, and the interface between the fluids replaces a heat transfer surface, as in a direct-contact heat exchanger.

A heat exchanger consists of heat transfer elements such as a core or matrix containing the heat transfer surface, and fluid distribution elements such as headers, manifolds, tanks, inlet and outlet nozzles or pipes, or seals. Usually, there are no moving parts in a heat exchanger; however, there are exceptions, such as a rotary regenerative exchanger (in which the matrix is mechanically driven to rotate at some design speed) or a scraped surface heat exchanger.

The heat transfer surface is a surface of the exchanger core that is in direct contact with fluids and through which heat is transferred by conduction. That portion of the surface that is in direct contact with both the hot and cold fluids and transfers heat between them is referred to as the primary or direct surface. To increase the heat transfer area, appendages may be intimately connected to the primary surface to provide an extended, secondary, or indirect surface. These extended surface elements are referred to as fins. Thus, heat is conducted through the fin and convected (and/or radiated) from the fin (through the surface area) to the surrounding fluid, or vice versa, depending on whether the fin is being cooled or heated. As a result, the addition of fins to the primary surface reduces the thermal resistance on that side and thereby increases the total heat transfer from the surface for the same temperature difference. Fins may form flow passages for the individual fluids but do not separate the two (or more) fluids of the exchanger. These secondary surfaces or fins may also be introduced primarily for structural strength purposes or to provide thorough mixing of a highly viscous liquid.

Not only are heat exchangers often used in the process, power, petroleum, transportation, air-conditioning, refrigeration, cryogenic, heat recovery, alternative fuel, and manufacturing industries, they also serve as key components of many industrial products available in the marketplace. These exchangers can be classified in many different ways. We will classify them according to transfer processes, number of fluids, and heat transfer mechanisms. Conventional heat exchangers are further classified according to construction type and flow arrangements. Another arbitrary classification can be made, based on the heat transfer surface area/volume ratio, into compact and noncompact heat exchangers. This classification is made because the type of equipment, fields of applications, and design techniques generally differ. Heat exchangers can also be classified according to the process function. Additional ways to classify heat exchangers are by fluid type (gas–gas, gas–liquid, liquid–liquid, gas two-phase, liquid two-phase, etc.), industry, and so on.