A case study for influence of building thermal insulation on cooling load and air-conditioning system in the hot and humid regions

Mehmet Azmi Aktacir\textsuperscript{a,}\textsuperscript{*}, Orhan Büyükalaca\textsuperscript{b}, Tuncay Yılmaz\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}Harran University, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Osmanbey Campus, \c{S}anlıurfa, Turkey
\textsuperscript{b}Çukurova University, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Adana, Turkey

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\textbf{A B S T R A C T}

Ensuring the effective thermal insulation in regions, where the cooling requirement of building with respect to heating requirement is dominant, is very important from the aspect of energy economy. In this study, the influence of thermal insulation on the building cooling load and the cooling system in case of air-conditioning by an all-air central air-conditioning system was evaluated for a sample building located in Adana, based on the results of three different types of insulation (A, B and C-type buildings) according to the energy efficiency index defined in the Thermal Insulation Regulation used in Turkey. The operating costs of the air-conditioning system were calculated using cooling bin numbers. Life-cycle cost analysis was carried out utilizing the present-worth cost method. Results showed that both the initial and the operating costs of the air-conditioning system were reduced considerably for all three insulation thicknesses. However, the optimum results in view of economic measurements were obtained for a C-type building. The thickness of thermal insulation for the buildings in the southern Turkey should be determined according to the guidelines for a C-type building.

\textsuperscript{*}Corresponding author. Tel.: +90 414 344 00 20; fax: +90 414 344 00 31.
E-mail address: aktacir@harran.edu.tr (M.A. Aktacir).

1. Introduction

Air-conditioning system (ACS) is responsible for a significant part of total energy consumption in building. Capacity of ACS is determined according to total cooling load of building. Building cooling loads consist of heat gains through opaque external surfaces and fenestration areas of the building and internal heat gains. Architectural and physical properties of building, such as thermal mass, structural material and its shape, are the most important parameters, which influence the space-cooling load. Another parameter is local climate. As reported in literature, different effective techniques such as free cooling, natural ventilation, thermal mass and night cooling can be used in order to reduce the cooling load. Therefore, a significant energy saving (more than 50\% as compared to an existing building) can be achieved [1–7]. On the other hand, thermal insulation is applied for reducing of heat loss or/and gain in buildings through the envelope. Yearly building cooling load and the peak cooling demand of building can be reduced significantly in the thermally insulated buildings located in hot dry and hot humid regions [7–13]. Therefore, reducing energy use for space cooling in buildings is a key measure to energy conservation and environmental protection. The main objective of this study is to reveal the influence of the building thermal insulation on the annual energy consumption of the cooling system in hot and humid regions, especially in the southern Turkey.

2. Application of thermal insulation in building

In Turkey, the thickness of thermal insulation material that should be applied to buildings is determined according to Turkish Standard 825 (TS 825) “thermal insulation in building” [14]. TS 825 is an application of “ISO 9164-Thermal insulation calculation of space heating requirements for residential buildings” in every respect and basically similar to EN 832-Thermal performance of buildings calculation of energy use for heating residential buildings. It is adapted to climatic conditions of Turkey [14,15]. In TS 825, the thickness of thermal insulation material can be determined according to the annual requirement of heating energy of the building which based on heat losses calculation. Turkey is classified into four climatic zones considering only heating energy requirement by using degree-day concept in TS 825. However, in the standard, cooling load of the building is not taken into consideration and the heat storage capacity of the building envelope is neglected. While heating is required in a region, cooling is needed in another region of Turkey. Because Turkey has a wide geographical area and different climatic regions, Bulut [16] showed that Turkey should be divided into five different heating degree-day and three different cooling degree-day regions. Aktacir and Büyükalaca [17] emphasized in result of study that the cooling-degree days for the main provinces \c{S}anlıurfa (South-eastern Anatolia Region), Antalya (Mediterranean
### Nomenclature

| ACS | air-conditioning system |
| AHU | air-handling unit |
| CAV | constant-air-volume system |
| COP\text{full} | coefficient of performance of the chiller at full load |
| COP\text{part} | coefficient of performance of the chiller at part load |
| \(E\text{part} \) | total energy consumption of the compressor in the chiller unit and the fans under real operating conditions |
| \(L\) | thermal insulation thickness (m) |
| \(M_{\text{fan,full}}\) | design (maximum) capacity of the fan (m\(^3\)/h) |
| \(M_{\text{fan,part}}\) | quantity of the mixing air supplied to room (m\(^3\)/h) |
| \(N_{\text{bin}}\) | bin number |
| \(O_{\text{cost}}\) | energy cost of air-conditioning system ($/year) |
| PLR\text{chill} | part load ratio of the chiller unit |
| PLR\text{fan} | part load ratio of the fan |
| PWC | present-worth cost method |
| \(Q\) | annual energy requirement of building (in TS 825) (kW h/m\(^2\)) |

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production (unit)</th>
<th>Import (unit)</th>
<th>Sold (unit)</th>
<th>Export (unit)</th>
</tr>
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<td>69,666</td>
<td>83,938</td>
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<tr>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>538</td>
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<tr>
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<td>128,057</td>
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<td>255,098</td>
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<tr>
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<td>557,879</td>
<td>1,117,613</td>
<td>376,186</td>
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<td>1,025,960</td>
<td>647,705</td>
<td>1,314,217</td>
<td>347,232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Sample building and thermal insulation

#### 3.1. Building characteristics

In this study, an office center with three floors and 27 offices located in Adana, Turkey (36° 59' latitude, 35° 18' longitude and 20 m altitude; in Mediterranean region) was considered. Adana has hot and humid summer and warm winter, and is in the first degree-day region according to TS 825. To benefit from solar energy and light, typical window areas of buildings in Mediterranean region are generally designed larger than that of the standard. Total gross area of the building is 1628 m\(^2\) and total fenestration area and external wall surface area are 299 m\(^2\) and 668 m\(^2\), respectively. Therefore, in this study, fenestration area is 45% of the external surface area of the building. Two people in each office and three laborers in each floor of the office center work between 09:00 and 20:00 h.

The height of each floor of the office center is 3 m. Fig. 1 shows the architectural plan of the ground floor of the sample building. Features of the opaque construction materials of the sample building are given in detail in Table 2.

#### 3.2. Calculation of insulation thickness

In this study, it was assumed that thermal insulation with three different thicknesses is applied to opaque external components of
the sample building (Building A, Building B and Building C). Thickness of the thermal insulation for each building was determined so that Buildings A, B and C are, respectively type A, B and C buildings according to the building classes defined in thermal insulation regulation [24]. In the regulation, the buildings are classified as “A-type”, “B-type” or “C-type” according to the ratio of the annual energy requirement of building $Q$ (kW h/m²) to the maximum allowed annual energy requirement of building $Q_I$ (kW h/m²). Table 3 presents classification of the energy efficiency index of the buildings according to the regulation. If $Q/Q_I$ is higher than 0.99, insulation should be applied to reduce annual energy required for building.

The thermal insulation thickness ($L$) and the overall heat transfer coefficient ($U$) of opaque constructions of the sample building given in Table 4 were obtained by equalizing $Q/Q_I$ to 0.79, 0.89 and 0.99 for Buildings A, B and C, respectively. The overall heat transfer coefficient of fenestration for all cases was 3 W/m²K.

In this study, architectural and physical properties of building are the same for all calculations, but not insulation thickness as given above.

3.3. Thermal insulation cost

The extruded polystyrene foam with thermal conductivity of 0.031 W/m K was used as thermal insulation material. The amount and cost of the thermal insulation material required for the building components for all three types of buildings considered in this study are given in Table 5.

4. Air-conditioning system

4.1. System design

All-air systems have been widely used in air-conditioning applications. The sample building is conditioned by an all-air central air handling unit (AHU) as shown in Fig. 2. As can be seen from the figure, the air-conditioning system consists of AHU, duct, air-cooled chiller system and control units. The indoor air conditions are 26 °C dry bulb temperature and 50% relative humidity. In the system, air is supplied to the air-conditioned volumes by mixing the minimum amount of the outdoor air (fresh) required for ventilation with the return air. Two main air distribution systems associated with all-air air-conditioning systems are constant-air-volume (CAV) and variable-air-volume systems (VAV). CAV systems have been used since the introduction of air-conditioning while VAV systems have been utilized since the 1960s. Energy saving is one of primary reasons that VAV systems are very popular design choices today for some commercial buildings and many industrial applications.

In this study, both CAV and VAV air distribution systems were investigated. In the VAV system, the mixing air supplied to conditioned space is constant at a temperature of 15 °C, but the mixing air flow rate is varied by the combined action of the closing of the zonal VAV box dampers and the fan speed controller to meet the building cooling load. In the CAV system, supply air flow rate is constant, but supply air temperature (minimum 15 °C) is varied to remove the heat gain from inside of conditioned space. Outdoor air requirement of the sample building was obtained to be 1596 m³/h for minimum ventilation level in accordance with ASHRAE Standard 62 ventilation rate procedure [25].
Building cooling load was calculated according to the Radiant Time Series (RTS) method suggested by ASHRAE [26,27]. Hourly distribution of the design-cooling load calculated for all types of buildings considered are shown in Fig. 3. In the calculation, outdoor design conditions for Adana were taken to be 38°C dry bulb temperature and 26°C wet bulb temperature. As shown in Fig. 3, design-cooling load of the no insulation building is 145.14 kW and sensible heat ratio (SHR) is 0.98. Design cooling loads of Buildings A, B and C are 92.15 kW, 94.19 kW and 97.11 kW, respectively, and their SHRs are all 0.97. Design cooling load of the sample building is decreased maximum 33% due to thermal insulation. Increase of the thickness of the insulation material does not reduce significantly cooling load of the building. Design cooling load of Building A, which has the best insulation, is only 2% and 5% less than that of Building B and Building C, respectively. Hourly distributions of parts of the design-cooling load for building without insulation are presented in Fig. 4. As it can be seen in Fig. 4, the cooling load due to opaque external components (external wall, roof, and floor) surface areas of the building without insulation is about 40% of the maximum total cooling load. For this reason, thermal insulation was applied to the building’s opaque surfaces for reducing of heat gain in buildings through the envelope. Moreover, space-cooling load can be reduced because of the low solar heat gains, when fenestration surface area (openings) is decreased. Similarly, cooling load is influenced by thermal mass of opaque elements [1,2,7]. In this study, the ratio of the building’s openings to the opaque areas is 0.45. Construction materials of sample building were the same for all calculations.

Variation of the ratio of cooling load due to insulation applied opaque external components to the total cooling load of the building.
ing during occupation period is shown in Fig. 5. The ratio obtained for the no insulation building is also shown in the figure. As can be seen from the figure, the opaque external components of the no insulation building constitute approximately 50% of the total load, while this percentage is between 2% and 20% for the insulated buildings (Buildings A, B and C).

Using the design conditions given above (design-cooling load, sensible heat ratio, minimum fresh air ventilation requirement and supply air temperature), the maximum (design) cooling coil capacity and the maximum (design) total mass flow rates of supply and return fans were determined with an iterative approach (Table 6). Therefore, a computer program was written for the calculations. Capacities of the supply and return fans for CAV and VAV systems are the same.

Equipment of the air-conditioning system was selected from a local supplier (Alarko-Carrier). Net cooling capacity and electricity consumption of the chiller unit selected are 111 kW and 47.4 kW for Buildings A, B and C, 152 kW and 67 kW for the no insulation building under nominal operating conditions (38 °C condenser temperature, 12 °C evaporator inlet and 7 °C outlet water temperature), respectively. Total mass flow rates of the supply and return fans in AHU for the no insulation building is 45,438 m³/h. The supply and return fans have 22 kW and 18.5 kW power consumptions, respectively. Total mass flow rates and power consumptions of the supply and return fans for Buildings A, B and C are 30,000 m³/h, 15 kW and 11 kW, respectively.

4.2. Initial cost

Total initial costs of the air-conditioning system including the chiller unit, AHU, duct and automation equipment costs are given in Table 7. When building envelopes were insulated (Buildings A, B and C), the initial cost of ACS for CAV and VAV systems were about 22% less than those of buildings without insulation.

4.3. Operating cost

The Bin method was used for calculation of energy consumption of the chiller unit. This method is based on the calculation of the energy consumption for different values of the outdoor temperature \( (T_{out}) \) and multiplying it by the corresponding number of hours \( (N_{bin}) \) in the temperature bin centered on that temperature [27]. The bin method, which has different forms today, has been developed from the various degree-day methods available. For many applications, the degree-day method should not be used, even with the variable-base method, because the heat loss coefficient, the efficiency of the HVAC system, or the balance point temperature may not be sufficiently constant. The efficiency of the HVAC equipment, for example, varies strongly with outdoor temperature. In such cases, a steady-state calculation can yield good results for the annual energy consumption if different temperature intervals and time periods are evaluated separately [27].

Monthly bin data with 3 °C increments in 4-h periods between 9:00–20:00 h during cooling season for Adana are given in Table 8 [28]. The cooling period for Adana, which has a hot and humid climate during summers, covers 184 days between May and October [7].

Operating costs of the air-conditioning systems during cooling season for 9:00–12:00 h, 13:00–16:00 h and 17:00–20:00 h were obtained using bin number. The minimum reducing ratio of the variable-speed drive (VSD) used in VAV system in order to adjust the operating speed of the fan was taken to be 30%.

Free cooling systems use outdoor air to reduce the cooling requirement when outdoor air is cool enough to be used as a cooling medium. In this study, the sample building is conditioned by free cooling (outdoor air is directly supplied to the air-conditioned space) when outdoor air temperature is least 8 °C lower than indoor temperature \( (T_{out} < 18 \degree C) \) [29]. By doing this, operating hours of the chiller unit in ACS is reduced. Therefore, both electricity consumption and environmental impact are reduced as well.

Total operating hours of the mechanic and free cooling systems during cooling season for Adana are presented in Table 9. Free cooling is possible only in May and October with the conditions \( T_{out} < 18 \). As shown in Table 9, the potential of free cooling is not enough for the occupation period considered in this study (9:00–20:00). However, an increase in the potential of free cooling for Adana is noticeably observed in night time (20:00–08:00).

The main electricity-consuming units in the air-conditioning systems are the fans and the chiller unit. In this study, the energy consumption of the ACS was determined by the following procedure. Firstly, part load ratio of the chiller unit \( (PLR_{chil}) \) was found using:

\[
PLR_{chil} = \frac{Q_{coil-part}}{Q_{coil-full}}
\]

where \( Q_{coil-full} \) indicates the full load of the chiller unit and is obtained from the manufacturer's data for all bin data (time shift and interval temperature), \( Q_{coil-part} \) indicates the instantaneous load removed by the ACS from interior of building. It was obtained using psychrometric analysis for all bin data. \( Q_{coil-part} \) is the sum of the cooling load of the building and the fresh air load due to the mixing air supplied to room.

Secondly, coefficient of performance at part load \( (COP_{part}) \) was calculated by the following equation [30]:

\[
COP_{part} = \frac{(COP_{full} \cdot PLR_{chil})}{0.16 + 0.32PLR_{chil} + 0.52PLR_{chil}^2}
\]

in which, \( COP_{full} \) indicates the coefficient of performance of the chiller at full load. It was obtained from the manufacturer's data for all bin data.

Thirdly, the power consumption of the compressor in the chiller unit for part load \( (W_{chil-part}) \) was determined using:
For determining the power consumption of the fan, the part load ratio of the fan (PLRfan) was found by the following equation:

\[
W_{\text{chill,part}} = \frac{Q_{\text{coil,part}}}{\text{COP}_{\text{part}}}
\]

(3)

\[
\text{PLR}_{\text{fan}} = \frac{M_{\text{fan,part}}}{M_{\text{fan,full}}}
\]

(4)

where \( M_{\text{fan,full}} \) represents the design (maximum) capacity of the fan. \( M_{\text{fan,part}} \) indicates the quantity of the mixing air supplied to...
room. For the CAV system, mass-flow rate is constant through the operation of the system; therefore even for the part-load conditions the fans consume the maximum power. Under peak-cooling conditions, the VAV system operates identically to a CAV system with AHU operating at maximum flow ($M_{fan,full}$) and maximum cooling coil capacity ($Q_{coil,full}$). However, at reduced cooling load, the airflow is reduced by the combined action of the closing of the zonal VAV box dampers and the fan speed controller. The power consumption of the fan under the real operating conditions ($W_{fan,part}$) was calculated by the following equation [19]:

$$W_{fan,part} = W_{fan,full}PLR_{fan}^1$$

in which, $W_{fan,full}$ indicates the power consumption of the fan at full load.

Finally, total energy consumption of the compressor in the chiller unit and the fans under real operating conditions ($E_{part}$) was obtained multiplying BIN data ($N_{bin}$) with the power consumption of the chiller unit and the fans:

$$E_{part} = N_{bin}(W_{chil,part} + W_{fan,part})$$

Energy cost of the system ($O_{cost}$), can be determined using the energy consumption of the system ($E_{part}$) and price of electricity ($T$), which is currently about 0.11 $/kW h$ in Turkey:

$$O_{cost} = E_{part}T$$

Using the procedure given above, operating costs of the chiller, the fans and the total operating cost were calculated and the results are given in Table 10 for a cooling season.

Seasonal operating cost of the ACS with VAV was determined to be $6967 for the no insulation building. In the case of Buildings A, B and C, seasonal operating cost is about 25% less than that of the no insulation building. Similar results were obtained with CAV air distribution system. In this case, seasonal operating cost for Buildings A, B and C are, respectively, 17.5%, 19.6% and 20.6% less than for the no insulation building.

### 5. Economic analyses

An economic analysis was carried out in order to determine influence of the thermal insulation on the initial and operating costs of the ACS. Present-worth cost (PWC) method, which is one of the analyses methods of the life-cycle cost, was used for evaluating the ACS in case of different thermal insulations [19,27,31,32]. Results of the LCC analysis are directly affected by the economic measures. Therefore, in the analyses, an annual interest rate of 14% and inflation rate of 8% were selected considering the present economic conditions of Turkey. The system life of the ACS was taken as 15 years. Total initial cost consists of the initial cost of the ACS and the cost of the building insulation.

The initial and operating costs of the ACS and the insulation cost of the building are given in Table 11 for all building types considered in this study.

Results of the economic analyses are given in Table 12. From the table it is seen that at the end of the lifetime (15 years), the present-worth cost of the no insulation building is $302,873 for the CAV air distribution system. There is almost no difference between the insulated buildings (<2.8%). The present-worth cost for the insulated buildings is approximately 26% smaller than that for the no insulation building.

In the case of the VAV air distribution system, the trend is similar to that for the CAV. While the present-worth cost of the no insulation building at the end of the lifetime is $223,634, its value for Buildings A, B and C are, respectively, 17.5%, 19.6% and 20.6% less than for the no insulation building.

Annual variation of the overall present-worth cost of the ACS for all building types is presented in Figs. 6 and 7 for VAV and CAV systems, respectively. From the figures it is seen that the present-worth cost of the no insulation building is always higher than that of Buildings A, B and C even from the initial installation of the system. The difference between the no insulation building and the insulated buildings continually increases during lifetime. These results show that the insulation applied to the building envelope for all thicknesses considered in this study is feasible.

In this study, Building C which has the least thermal insulation among the insulated building types, was compared with Buildings

### Table 10

Seasonal operating cost of air-conditioning system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Air distribution system</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>No insulation building ($/year)</th>
<th>Building A ($/year)</th>
<th>Building B ($/year)</th>
<th>Building C ($/year)</th>
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<tr>
<td>VAV</td>
<td>Fan</td>
<td>1590</td>
<td>1326</td>
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<td>1272</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chiller</td>
<td>5377</td>
<td>3914</td>
<td>3959</td>
<td>4031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6967</td>
<td>5240</td>
<td>5258</td>
<td>5303</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAV</td>
<td>Fan</td>
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<td>5738</td>
<td>5738</td>
<td>5738</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chiller</td>
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<td>3914</td>
<td>3959</td>
<td>4031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14,315</td>
<td>9652</td>
<td>9697</td>
<td>9769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 11

Insulation cost of the building, the initial and operating costs of air-conditioning system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost type</th>
<th>Air distribution system</th>
<th>No insulation building ($)</th>
<th>Building A ($)</th>
<th>Building B ($)</th>
<th>Building C ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building insulation cost</td>
<td>VAV and CAV</td>
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<td>15,278</td>
<td>10,196</td>
<td>7288</td>
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<td>Initial cost of the ACS</td>
<td>VAV</td>
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<td>3914</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CAV</td>
<td>98,754</td>
<td>5240</td>
<td>5258</td>
<td>5303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating cost of the ACS</td>
<td>VAV</td>
<td>6967</td>
<td>5240</td>
<td>5258</td>
<td>5303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CAV</td>
<td>14,315</td>
<td>9652</td>
<td>9697</td>
<td>9769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 12

Results of economic analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Building</th>
<th>PWC at the end of lifetime ($)</th>
<th>Saving (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAV</td>
<td>No insulation</td>
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<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>227,182</td>
<td>75,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>222,741</td>
<td>80,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>220,860</td>
<td>82,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAV</td>
<td>No insulation</td>
<td>223,634</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>184,616</td>
<td>39,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>179,790</td>
<td>43,844</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>177,524</td>
<td>46,110</td>
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</table>
A and B to determine the optimum thermal insulation thickness from economy point of view. Extra investment needed for Buildings A and B with respect to Building C is $7990 and $2908, respectively. Compared with these extra investments needed, the savings due to thicker insulations (Buildings A and B) are not significant. Yearly savings in operating cost of ACS with VAV for Buildings A and B were found to be, respectively, $117 and $72 with respect to Building C (Table 13). In the case of the CAV system, the savings is satisfactory from economic aspect. Therefore, if a building located in hot regions of Turkey is constructed according to C-type building in “energy efficiency index” both the operating and initial costs of the ACS are significantly reduced.

As a result, it is suggested that the thickness of thermal insulation material for buildings in the coastal provinces located in the Mediterranean countries (such as Turkey, Italy, Spain and Greece), which have hot and longer summers and warm winters, should be determined according to the cooling-degree day. Otherwise, the thermal insulation applied considering only heating degree-day concept may be insufficient during cooling period.

6. Conclusions

In this study, a sample building located in Adana in Mediterranean Region (hot and humid summer and warm winter) was considered for studying the influence of different thicknesses of insulation applied to the opaque external components on cooling load and energy consumption of air-conditioning system. Energy performance of the building for cooling period was investigated with life-cycle cost analysis. The thicknesses of the insulation material were determined according to A, B and C-type buildings defined in the “energy efficiency index” in TS 825.

Design cooling load of the sample building decreased maximum 33% due to thermal insulation. The capacities of the equipment used in the air-conditioning system for the insulated buildings were lower than that of the no insulation building. Therefore, both the initial and the operating costs of the ACS were reduced considerably. For Buildings A, B and C:

- initial cost of the ACS for CAV and VAV systems are about 22% less,
- operating cost of the ACS is 25% less for VAV and 33% less for CAV,

with respect to the no insulation building.

Results of economic analyses show that the insulation investments for Buildings A, B and C are feasible due to reduced operating and initial costs of the ACS. However, when the different insulation thicknesses considered in this study are compared with each other, it is clearly seen that C-type insulation applied to buildings is satisfactory from economic aspect. Therefore, if a building located in hot regions of Turkey is constructed according to C-type building in “energy efficiency index” both the operating and initial costs of the ACS are significantly reduced.

As a result, it is suggested that the thickness of thermal insulation material for buildings in the coastal provinces located in the Mediterranean countries (such as Turkey, Italy, Spain and Greece), which have hot and longer summers and warm winters, should be determined according to the cooling-degree day. Otherwise, the thermal insulation applied considering only heating degree-day concept may be insufficient during cooling period.

References


