

Electronic Thermostat Control Unit and its use in Multipoint Temperature Controller for Refrigeration and Heating Systems

This invention relates to an electronic digital thermostat control unit and its use in a Multipoint Temperature Controller for Refrigeration and Heating Systems.

BACKGROUND

Electrical controls in refrigeration/heating systems basically comprise a simple thermostat, motor starting relay and an over load protector for controlling the motors. Larger models also incorporate a timer and a simple logic to control an electric heater (for the automatic defrost function). Some expensive models include one or more solenoids or motors to control blowers/air flow vanes for automatic temperature control in additional compartments of the unit.

The traditional apparatus for measuring and controlling temperatures in thermostats, consists of :

- i. Gas/liquid filled capillaries in which the expansion/contraction of the gas/liquid with change in temperature is used to determine/control the temperature.
- ii. Bi-metallic elements in which the deflection/deformation of a bi-metallic strip of two metals with widely different coefficients of thermal expansion, determines the temperature sensed by it.
- iii. Mechanical bellows that are mechanically pushed by the expanding gas/liquid and that in turn move the mechanical contact and actuate the electrical circuit at a definite 'set' value.
- iv. The deflecting bi-metallic strips itself performs the function of a moving mechanical switches that controls the electrical circuit.

These traditional methods / apparatus suffer from the following drawbacks:

- a. Imprecise and imperfect sensing of temperatures
- b. Low reliability

Electronic digital thermostats are also available for use. These thermostats have been described, for instance, in US patent nos. 5592989; 5528017; 5520327; 5329991; 5107918; 4948044; 4799176; 4751961; 4663654 and 4638850. However, these electronic digital thermostats use expensive temperature sensors such as thermistors, thermocouples or platinum resistance thermometers. These sensors require complex and expensive interface circuits. This has made these thermostats unacceptable for use in all but the most expensive models of the refrigerators. In addition, many of the benefits of electronic thermostats, such as improved reliability of operation, are not effectively realized, when these are used with the conventional starting relay, over load protector, defrost timer, and the like. Replacing each of these elements with electronic equivalents or providing energy saving and other useful end-user functions, has so far proved to be economically viable in only the most expensive models of refrigeration units

Conventional over load protection mechanisms are based on one of the following mechanisms:

- a. Bi-metallic elements in which the deflection/deformation of a bi-metallic strip of two metals with widely different coefficients of thermal expansions, determines the temperature sensed by it. The mechanical dimensions and profile of the bi-metallic strip determines the temperature at which the thermal trip action occurs to perform the over load protection function.
- b. Positive temperature coefficient (PTC) resistance elements, the electrical resistance of which increases dramatically with increase in temperature beyond a certain 'threshold' temperature, so that the resistance element effectively reduces the current in the electrical circuit to an insignificant value.

Both these methods have drawbacks. The bi-metallic over-load protector is a mechanically moving part that experiences electrical arcing every time it breaks the electrical circuit, causing electrical interference while at the same time resulting in corrosion of the contacts.

The PTC resistance element is similarly exposed to constant heat-cool cycles that create thermal stress and reduce reliability. At the same time, the electrical and temperature characteristics of the PTC element need to be matched with the load, in order to produce the correct electrical behaviour. This limits flexibility and is

at best a compromise in terms of effectiveness, as exact matching of PTC characteristics to the load characteristics is rarely possible.

Similarly, the conventional methods of implementing the starting relay functions and the associated problems are:

- a. The use of a conventional mechanical relay, which suffers from the standard problem of electrical arcing and reduce reliability resulting from the use of a moving mechanical contact to make/break an electrical circuit.
- b. The use of a positive temperature coefficient (PTC) resisted element which suffers from the same problems that are encountered in the use of a PTC element for the over load protector function.

The conventional defrost timer in a refrigeration system is an electro-mechanical or motorized timer mechanism. Since it has constantly moving mechanical parts, and an arcing electrical contact, its reliability is quite limited.

Besides the problems listed above, conventional electrical controls in refrigeration systems have proved to be unwieldy and even expensive in terms of implementing multi-zone temperature control functions, that are desirable in larger refrigeration systems. In fact, some desirable functions that result in energy saving or provide useful features for the end user, are impractical to implement using such control mechanisms.

The object of this invention is to provide an electronic digital thermostat which is cost effective, operationally safe and reliable.

A further object of this invention is to provide a single, multipoint compact electronic control unit by using the said electronic digital thermostat that overcomes all the above-mentioned drawbacks and provides the advantages of the expensive electronic controls currently available, at low cost.

To achieve the said objective this invention provides an electronic digital thermostat control unit which comprises:

- a p-n junction temperature sensing element,
- a constant current source to drive the said p-n junction element,

- the output of the said p-n junction element is connected to an analogue-to-digital converter to produce a digital output,
- the said digital output is connected to a circuit for correcting the sensitivity and offset values of the sensor using calibration data stored in non-volatile memory,
- the corrected output is connected to one input of at least one digital comparator and the other input of each digital comparator receives a digital reference value from the said non-volatile memory or from variable control means,
- the output of the said comparators is filtered using digital noise filters, to eliminate spurious outputs and is stored in a control latch to set/reset the input of a control latch whenever the output of digital comparator is 'true', for actuating the device in the consumer/industrial product that performs the temperature correction.

The output of the said control latch is connected to an output drive and protection circuit which monitors the load conditions continuously and deactivates the drive to the solid state switch, if overload conditions are encountered in the said consumer/industrial product. These overload conditions means thermal overload, over-current and turn-on inrush current conditions. Accordingly, the Output Drive and Protection Circuit includes a Thermal Protection circuit, an Over-current Protection Circuit and a 'Soft Start' circuit. The Thermal Protection Circuit monitors the temperature of the load, while the Over-current Protection Circuit monitors the current drawn by the load, and the soft start circuit provides an effective reduced voltage start-up to the load during the initial period of the turn-on and thereby decreases the inrush current stress produced on the load in the case of motor and heater loads.

The temperature display unit is connected to one of the inputs of the-said digital comparator(s) which receives its input from the output of the sensitivity and offset correction circuit and a selection switch permits the selective display of either the sensed temperature or the reference value from the digitized output from the potentiometer/switch.

A variable control means is provided in series with analogue-to-digital converter for varying the reference digital value fed to the digital comparator through a

multiplexer for adjustment of the control limits of the temperature. The said variable control means is a potentiometer or switch which is connected to a switch debounce circuit and digital counter to remove spurious switch transitions and to increment/decrement a digital counter, the output of which is connected to the input of a digital multiplexer to determine whether the user control signal from the potentiometer/switch or the constant value from the non-volatile memory is to be used as a reference value for the digital comparator.

The output of the digital multiplexer is controlled by the signal from the selector switch through a switch debounce circuit.

The said digital comparator compares the corrected and sensed temperature with the reference value and generates a 'true'/'false' output to set/reset a control latch after filtering through noise filters to eliminate spurious outputs.

One of the digital comparators receives a fixed reference value from the non-volatile memory and the other digital comparator receives its reference value either from the non-volatile memory or from a user variable control depending upon the state of a selector switch that toggles the selection

The power supply used for powering the electronic digital thermostat control unit preferably consists of a low loss capacitive voltage dropping network followed by a voltage clamping device, a rectifier and a filter network to provide a D.C. voltage. The said D.C. power supply provides an output in the 3-6 volts range.

A clock oscillator is connected to each circuit of the electronic digital thermostat control unit for providing the timing signals for the operation of each circuit. The said clock oscillator is a quartz clock oscillator operating in the 4-8 MHz frequency range.

The entire control circuit is implemented as a custom Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) to provide a miniature and cost effective thermostat excluding the sensor, a variable user control potentiometer/switch, the selector switch, temperature display unit and the solid state switch.

In other embodiments the said ASIC excludes non-volatile memory, clock circuit and the power supply in order to provide larger non-volatile memory capacities for storage of temperature data and interfaces to different types and sizes of displays in one embodiment, and in other embodiment further excludes the output drive and protection circuit in order to facilitate the use of higher power solid state switch, or to provide flexibility of control in multipoint applications.

To achieve the second objective this invention provides an electronic multi-point temperature control unit comprising:

- a plurality of electronic thermostat control units as described above having a common non-volatile memory that stores reference and calibration data, for controlling the temperature in the required number of places in the refrigeration/ heating systems, wherein
- the outputs from the control latch units of the said electronic thermostat units are connected to logic circuit which selectively connects the outputs to one or more Output Drive and Protection Circuits using the data stored separately in the non-volatile memory of the electronic thermostat unit, the said Output Drive and Protection circuits drive and monitor the load, through solid state switches,
- a central control unit connected to:
 - i each of the said outputs from the control latch units of electronic thermostat control units and the inputs of the said output drive and protection circuits for enabling or disabling the said electronic thermostat control units and output of said drive and protection circuits depending upon the combination of the output from the electronic thermostat control unit and the user control input received from the potentiometer or digital counters, as well as the occurrence of fault conditions.
 - ii. a system timers unit which generates the timing signals for enabling/disabling one or more of the said Output Drive and protection circuits during special modes of operation,
 - iii. a starting relay circuit which provides the signals required to control one or more output drive and protection circuits at the time when the said load is to be switched on.

Any one or more of the Output Drive and Protection Circuit includes a thermal protection circuit, an over-current protection circuit and a 'Soft Start' circuit, the thermal protection circuit monitors the temperature of the load, while the over-current protection circuit monitors the current drawn by the load and the 'Soft Start' circuit provides an effective reduced voltage start-up to the load, during the initial period of the turn-on, and thereby decreases the in-rush current stress produced on the load in case of motor and heater loads.

The said Central Control Unit is a Logic circuit for implementing special functions e.g. Automatic Defrost and Quick-Freeze in the case of Refrigerators, and Timed Heating Cycles in case of Heating Systems.

A display unit is connected to the output of one of the said electronic thermostat control units for displaying temperature.

At least one switch is connected through a switch debounce circuit and a digital counter to the input of the said central control unit for providing the user control signal required to operate the said electronic multi-point temperature control unit.

The entire control circuit is implemented as a custom Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC), to provide a miniature and cost effective electronic multipoint temperature control unit, excluding the sensors of the electronic thermostat control units, variable user control switch(es), selector switch, temperature display unit, power supply and solid state switches.

In another implementation, the said ASIC excludes non-volatile memory, clock circuit and the power supply in order to provide larger non-volatile memory capacities for storage of temperature data and interfaces to different types and sizes of displays.

The invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings:

Fig. 1 shows the electronic digital thermostat control unit according to this invention using a potentiometer for varying the temperature control value.

Fig. 1(a) shows the output drive and protection circuit in the electronic digital thermostat control unit.

Fig. 2 shows an alternate embodiment of the unit using a switch to vary the temperature control value

Fig. 3 shows the transformer less power supply used to provide power to the electronic thermostat unit.

Fig. 4 shows an application of the electronic thermostat control unit.

Fig. 5 shows an embodiment in which the entire control circuit is implemented as an Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) excluding the sensor, variable user control potentiometer/switch, selector switch, temperature display unit and solid state switch.

Fig. 6 shows an alternative embodiment in the form of ASIC in which the non-volatile memory, clock oscillator and DC power supply are external to the ASIC.

Fig. 7 shows yet another embodiment in the form of ASIC in which the non-volatile memory, clock oscillator, DC power supply and output drive and protection circuit are external to the ASIC.

Fig. 8 shows the electronic multi-point temperature control unit using five electronic thermostat control units having a common non-volatile memory.

Fig. 8(a) shows the Output Drive and protection Circuit in electronic multipoint temperature control unit.

Fig. 9 shows an application of the electronic multi-point temperature control unit in a refrigerator with three separate compartments.

Fig. 10 shows an application of the electronic multi-point temperature control unit in a coffee-vending machine.

Fig. 11 shows an embodiment in which the entire circuit except the sensors, switches, DC power supply, solid state switches, and display unit is implemented as an Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC).

Fig. 12 shows an embodiment in which the entire circuit except the sensors of the electronic thermostat control units, switches, DC power supply, solid state switches, the non-volatile memory and the display unit is implemented as an Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC).

Referring to Figs. 1 and 1(a), item (1) shows a sensor consisting of a single semi-conductor p-n junction (eg. a diode). A constant current source (2) provides the bias current for the said sensor (1). The signal from the sensor (1) which is an analogue D.C. voltage that decreases linearly with the temperature is converted to digital form by an analogue-to-digital converter (3). The digital output is adjusted for sensor offset and sensitivity by a sensitivity and offset correction digital circuit (4) that receives the correction factor data in digital form from a non-volatile memory (19). This digital output is applied to digital comparators (5 & 6). Each digital comparator receives a digital reference value along with the digital value received from the sensitivity and offset correction digital circuit (4) at its input terminals. The digital comparator (5) receives a fixed value from the non-volatile memory (19) and the other digital comparator (6) receives its reference value from either the non-volatile memory (19) or from

a user-variable control (12) depending on the on/off state of selector switch (16). In the case where the user control variable is a potentiometer (12), the DC voltage from the potentiometer is fed to an analogue-to-digital converter (14) that converts it to a digital value suitable for digital comparator (6). A constant current source (13) drives the potentiometer (12) to ensure an output that is independent of power supply fluctuations. The output of the analogue-to-digital converter (14) is fed to a digital multiplexer (15) that determines whether the user-control signal from the potentiometer, or the constant value from the non-volatile memory is to be used as the 'cut-out' reference for the digital comparator (6). The digital multiplexer (15) receives its control input from the output of the Switch Debounce circuit (17) which interfaces the selector switch (16). The output of the two digital comparators (5 & 6) are passed through digital noise filters (7 & 8) to remove spurious outputs and then applied to the inputs of a control latch (9) which controls the output drive and the protection circuit (10). The output drive and protection circuit (10) which includes the 'Soft Start' circuit (10A), thermal over-load protection circuit (10B) and over-current protection circuit (10C) drives the Solid State Switch (11) to actuate the relevant device in the consumer/industrial appliance to correct the temperature and minimize the in-rush current stress produced on the load in case of motor and heater loads as well as protect against over-heat and current over-load conditions. The output of sensitivity and offset correction digital circuit (4) is also brought out for displaying the sensed temperature on a display unit (18). A clock circuit (20) and a power supply (21) is connected to the entire circuit as shown in figure 1.

In fig. 2, the user variable control originates from a switch (22) instead of a potentiometer (12). The signal from the switch (22) is fed to Switch Debounce circuit (23) that feeds a pulse on every switch depression to a digital counter (24) which represents the selected control limit value supplied to the digital comparator (6) through digital multiplexer (15), which determines whether the output of the digital counter (24) or the fixed value from the non-volatile memory (19) is supplied to the input of the digital comparator (6). The digital multiplexer (15) receives its control input from the output of the Debounce switch (17) that interfaces the selector switch (16).

Fig. 3 shows the transformer less power supply (21) of 3 to 6 volts, used to provide power to the electronic digital thermostat control unit. A capacitive voltage dropping network (25), with a voltage clamping zener diode (26) reduces the input high A.C. voltage to a low value. This low value AC voltage is then rectified by a diode (27) and then filtered by a capacitor (28) to produce a low voltage D.C. supply that feeds power to the circuit.

Fig. 4 shows an application of the electronic digital thermostat control unit. The sensor element (1) is placed inside the appliance (29), the temperature of which is to be controlled (eg. Refrigerator in case of consumer goods, or engine coolant casing, in the case of an industrial/automotive application). The sensor (1) is located remotely from the electronic digital thermostat control unit (30). Similarly, the device (31) which is to be actuated by the electronic digital thermostat control unit to provide the temperature correction to the compressor motor in the case of refrigerator or the radiator cooling fan/cooling pumps in the case of an air cooled or water cooled engine is located remotely.

Fig. 5 shows an implementation of the electronic digital thermostat control unit in the form of a custom Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) (32) to provide a solution that is both very miniature and cost effective. The sensor (1) connects to the ASIC. Similarly, the solid state switch (11) connects to the output of the ASIC. The two switches (16 & 22) for the selection of the 'cut-out' temperature and the setting of the control limit are also connected separately to the ASIC (32). The display unit (18) is directly connected to the ASIC (pins) and driven by it separately.

Fig. 6 shows another embodiment using a ASIC (33) in which the non-volatile memory (19), clock oscillator (20) and the power supply (21) are external to the ASIC in order to provide for larger non-volatile memory capacities and interfaces to several different types and sizes of displays. The larger capacity of the non-volatile memory (19) permits more storage of temperature data.

Fig. 7 shows yet another embodiment of the electronic digital thermostat control unit in the form of ASIC (34), wherein the putout drive and protection circuit (10) is also external in order to facilitate the use of higher power solid state switches that require more drive current than is provided by a single chip. This enables the control of significantly higher capacity loads

WORKING:

A sensor consisting of a single semi-conductor p-n junction diode (1) under a constant current bias provided by a constant current source (2) produces a DC voltage that decreases in direct proportion to the increase in the sensed temperature. This DC voltage is fed to the input of an analogue-to-digital converter (3). The analogue-to-digital converter produces a digital output that is equal to the DC voltage supplied at its input. This digital output is then fed to the input of a sensitivity and offset correction digital circuit (4) that corrects it for sensor offset and sensitivity by applying a correction factor that is received by it in digital form from non-volatile memory (19). This produces a corrected, sensed temperature value.

This corrected sensed temperature value is applied to the one input of each of the digital comparators (5 & 6). Digital comparator (5) receives a fixed 'reference' value from the non-volatile memory (19) at its other input. The corrected, sensed temperature value received from the sensitivity and offset correction digital circuit (4) is compared with the 'reference' value by digital comparator (5) and a 'true'/'false' output is generated. The output of digital comparator (5) is fed to a digital noise filter (7) in order to eliminate spurious outputs. The filtered output from the digital noise filter (7) is applied to the 'reset' input of a control latch (9). The control latch is thus reset whenever the output of digital comparator (5) is 'true'.

The other digital comparator (6) receives its 'reference' value from either the non-volatile memory (19) or from a user variable control (12) depending upon the state of selector switch (16), that toggles the selection. In the case where the user-variable control is a potentiometer (12), the DC voltage from the potentiometer is fed to an analogue-to-digital converter (14) that converts it to a digital value suitable for digital comparator (6). A constant current source (13) drives the potentiometer to ensure its output is independent of power supply fluctuations. The output of the analogue-to-digital converter (14) is fed to a digital multiplexer (15) that determines whether the user - control signal from the potentiometer (12), or the constant value from the non-volatile memory (19), is to be used as the reference for the digital comparator (6).

Where the user control is supplied from a switch (22) instead of potentiometer (12) (see figure 2), the switch signal is first passed through a switch debounce circuit (23) to remove spurious switch transitions, and then used to increment/decrement a digital counter (24). The output of the digital counter (24) is then applied to the input of digital multiplexer (15) which determines whether the user-control signal from the switch (22), or the constant value from the non-volatile memory (19), is to be used as a 'reference' value for the digital comparator (6).

The output of digital multiplexer (15) is controlled by the signal from selector switch (16) after processing by the switch debounce circuit (17) to remove spurious switch transitions. Digital comparator (6) compares the corrected, sensed temperature value with the reference value and generates a 'true'/'false' output that is used to 'set' control latch (9) after filtering through digital noise filter (8) to eliminate spurious outputs..

The control latch (9) outputs a digital signal that enables / disables the output drive and protection circuit (10). The output drive and protection circuit (10)

generates the signals necessary to drive the solid state switch (11) in order to actuate the relevant device in the consumer/industrial appliance to correct the temperature. The output drive and protection circuit (10) which contains the thermal overload protection circuit (10B) and current over-load protection circuit (10C), monitors the load conditions continuously and deactivates the drive to the solid state switch (11) if thermal or current overload conditions are encountered. The Output Drive and Protection Circuit also includes a 'Soft Start' circuit (10A) to provide an effective reduced voltage start-up to the load, during the initial period of the turn-on, and thereby decreases the in-rush current stress produced on the load in case of motor and heater loads.

The output of the sensitivity and offset correction digital circuit (4) is also brought out for displaying the sensed temperature on a display unit (18). A selection switch (not shown), connected to the input of the display unit (18) also enables a selective display of either the sensed temperature, as indicated by the output from the sensitivity and offset correction digital circuit (4), or the user - selected reference temperature as determined by the signal at the output of the digital multiplexer (15). A clock oscillator circuit (20) based on a quartz crystal oscillator in the 4-8 MHz frequency range generates all the timing signals necessary to operate each circuit block, while a power supply (21) supplies the required voltage and current to each circuit block of the electronic digital thermostat control unit.

In figs. 8 and 8(a), the electronic multipoint temperature control unit is shown wherein items (35) to (39) show single-PN-junction (eg. diode) temperature sensors connected to electronic thermostat control units (40) to (44) having a common non-volatile memory (75) that stores reference and calibration data. The outputs from control latch units of the electronic thermostat control units are connected to a logic circuit (45) which selectively connects these outputs to the inputs of one or more output drive and protection circuits (46 to 50) using the data stored separately in the said non-volatile memory (75). The output from each output drive and protection circuit goes to solid state switches (51) to (55) which perform the ON/OFF action on the load (e.g. Refrigerator compressor motor, blower, defrost heater and the like). Any one or more of the Output Drive and Protection Circuits includes a 'Soft Start' circuit (46A), thermal over-load protection circuit (46B) and over-current protection circuit (46C) to provide

- an effective reduced voltage start up to the load, during the initial period of the turn-on, and thereby decreases the in-rush current stress produced on the load in case of motor and heater loads.
- protection against thermal and current over-load conditions

The central control unit (71) selectively enables or disables the electronic thermostat control units (40) to (44), and the output drive and protection circuits (46) to (50) during fault conditions as well as during certain modes of operation (eg. 'defrost' and 'quick freeze' modes in the case of a refrigerator).

User control signals are received from one or more switches (56) to (60) located on the control panel of the unit. The signal from each switch is passed through a switch debounce circuit (61) to (65) to remove spurious output and then used to update a digital counter (66) to (70). The outputs from the digital counters are connected to inputs of the central control unit (71) and provide the user control data required to control the operation of the electronic multi-point temperature control unit. The output of the system timer unit (72), which contains electronic timers for special functions such as automatic defrost and 'quick freeze', 'door open alarm', 'automatic fault reset' features in the case of a refrigerator application or 'water fill timer', 'milk fill timer', 'automatic turn-on at preset time' and 'automatic turn-off at preset time' features in the case of the coffee vending machine, connects to an input of the central control unit (71), and provides signals that determine control actions for enabling or disabling the electronic thermostat control units (40) to (44) and the output drive and protection circuits (46) to (50).

The Start Relay Circuit block (73) contains circuitry for delivering a timed signal to the start winding of a dual-winding electric motor such as the refrigeration unit's compressor motor. This signal is routed through the central control unit (71) to one of the output drive and protection circuit blocks.

A clock oscillator (74) of frequency 4-8 MHz, is used to provide the timing signals necessary for the operation of each circuit of the electronic multi-point temperature control unit. The said clock oscillator is the same as used in the electronic thermostat unit.

Non-volatile memory (75) is used to store all the control and calibration data required for the said electronic thermostat control units and the said logic circuit.

A power supply (76) is used for powering the electronic multi-point temperature control unit. The said power supply is connected to all the internal blocks of the unit and is the same as used in the electronic thermostat control unit.

A display unit (77) is provided at the output of one of the electronic thermostat control units.

Fig. 9 shows an application of the electronic multi-point temperature control unit in a three-zone refrigerator (78) using five electronic thermostat control units and five output drive and protection circuits. Three temperature sensors (79) to (81) located in each of the three zones measures the temperature of the environment in each zone. In addition, a fourth sensor (82) located on the housing of the compressor (84) monitors the temperature of the compressor in order to provide a thermal overload function. A fifth sensor (83) placed next to the defrost heater element (85) enables precise temperature control during the defrost cycle. Each electronic thermostat control unit monitors the temperature in the compartment in which it is located and compares it with the specified 'cut-out' and 'cut-in' temperature, for the said compartment enabling its corresponding output drive and protection circuit whenever the monitored temperature crosses the 'cut-in' limit and disabling it whenever the monitored temperature crosses the 'cut-out' limit. The outputs from the five solid state switches (51) to (55) are connected to the compressor motor 'RUN' winding, compressor motor 'START' winding, the defrost heater element, blower #1 (86) located in one compartment of the refrigerator and blower #2 (87) located in another compartment of the refrigerator.

Fig. 10 shows an application of the electronic multi-point temperature control unit in a coffee vending machine (89) using three electronic thermostat control units and three output drive and protection circuits. A temperature sensor (90) located in contact with the stainless-steel vessel (91) containing the water for the coffee, measures the temperature of the water as it is heated. Second and third sensors (92) and (93) located on the housing of the hot-water dispensing pump (94) and the milk dispensing pump (95) monitor the temperature of the pumps in order to provide thermal overload protection. The outputs from the three solid state switches (51) to (53) are connected to the heater (96), and the said hot-water dispensing pump (94) and said milk-dispensing pump (95) to monitor the required temperature.

Fig. 11 shows an implementation of the electronic multi-point temperature control unit in the form of a custom Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) (97), in which the sensors (35) to (39) of the electronic thermostat control units, user control switches (56) to (60), DC power supply (76) and solid state switches (51) to (55) are excluded, to provide a solution that is both very miniature and cost-effective.

Fig. 12 shows another embodiment electronic multi-point temperature control unit using an ASIC (98) in which the sensors (35) to (39) of the electronic thermostat control units, user control switches (56) to (60), DC power supply (76) and solid state switches (51) to (55), and the non-volatile memory (75), are

external to the ASIC in order to provide for larger data storage and to interface to several different types and sizes of displays.

WORKING:

Multiple Electronic Thermostat Control Units (40) to (44) having a common non-volatile memory (75), monitor the temperature at different points of the environment that is to be controlled for temperature. The outputs from each of the control latch units of the said electronic thermostat control units connect to a logic circuit (45) which selectively connects them to the inputs of one or more output drive and protection circuits (46) to (50), in accordance with the data received from the said non-volatile memory (75). Each electronic thermostat control unit monitors the temperature in the compartment in which it is located and compares it with the specified 'cut-out' and 'cut-in' temperature, enabling its corresponding output drive and protection circuit whenever the monitored temperature crosses the 'cut in' limit and disabling it whenever the monitored temperature crosses the 'cut out' limit. The outputs from the output drive and protection circuits (46) to (50) connect to the inputs of solid state switches (51) to (55) through the said output drive and protection circuits which drive and monitor the load (blower, compressor, heater, pump or solenoid valve of the refrigeration/heating system). Any one or more of the output drive and protection circuits (46) include a 'Soft Start' Circuit (46A), thermal over-load protection circuit (46B) and over-current protection circuit (46C) to provide

- an effective reduced voltage start-up to the load, during the initial period of turn-on and thereby decrease the in-rush current stress produced on the load in case of motor and heater loads
- a protection against thermal and current over-load conditions

A central control unit (71) receives user control values from switches (56) to (60) after routing through switch debounce circuits (61) to (65) to eliminate spurious transitions and digital counters (66) to (70) to produce a digital value. The said central control unit also receives inputs from a system timers unit (72) which supplies control signals from one or more internal timers, as well as from a starting relay circuit (73) which generates the signals required to supply timed 'ON' pulses to motor 'START' windings when these are turned ON. The said Central Control circuit produces enable/disable control signals for each of the electronic thermostat control units and output drive and protection circuits, based on the values of its input signals, and thereby performs the control actions necessary for the operation of the entire electronic multi-point temperature control unit as well as of application-specific modes of operation (e.g. "Defrost" and "Quick Freeze" modes in the case of a refrigerator).

**Claims :**

1. An electronic digital thermostat control unit comprising:
 - a p-n junction temperature sensing element,
 - a constant current source to drive the said p-n junction element,
 - the output of the said p-n junction element is connected to an analogue-to-digital converter to produce a digital output,
 - the said digital output is connected to a circuit for correcting the sensitivity and offset values of the sensor using calibration data stored in non-volatile memory,
 - the corrected output is connected to one input of at least one digital comparator and the other input of each digital comparator receives a digital reference value from the said non-volatile memory or from variable control means,
 - the output of the said comparators are filtered using digital noise filters, to eliminate spurious outputs and is stored in a control latch to set/reset the input of a control latch whenever the output of digital comparator is 'true' for actuating the device in the consumer/industrial product that performs the temperature correction.
2. An electronic digital thermostat control unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the output of the said control latch is connected to an output drive and protection circuit which monitors the load conditions continuously and deactivates the drive to the solid state switch, if overload conditions are encountered in the said consumer/industrial product.
3. An electronic digital thermostat control unit as claimed in claim 2 wherein the said output drive and protection circuit includes a thermal protection circuit, an over-current protection circuit and a 'Soft Start' circuit, the thermal protection circuit monitors the temperature of the load, while the over-current protection circuit monitors the current drawn by the load and the 'Soft Start' circuit provides an effective reduced voltage start-up to the load during the initial period of the turn-on and thereby decreases the in-



rush current stress produced on the load in the case of motor and heater loads.

4. An electronic digital thermostat control unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein a variable control means is provided in series with analogue-to-digital converter for varying the reference digital value fed to the digital comparator through a multiplexer for adjustment of the control limits of the temperature.
5. An electronic digital thermostat control unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the variable control means is a potentiometer or a switch which is connected to a switch debounce circuit and digital counter to remove spurious switch transitions and to increment/decrement a digital counter respectively, the output of the said digital counter or the said potentiometer is connected to the input of a digital multiplexer to determine whether user control signal from the switch or the constant value from the non-volatile memory is to be used as a reference value for the digital comparator.
6. An electronic digital thermostat control unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the entire control circuit is implemented as a custom Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) to provide miniature and cost effective thermostat excluding the sensor, a variable user control potentiometer/switch, the selector switch, temperature display unit and the solid state switch.
7. An electronic digital thermostat control unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the said ASIC excludes non-volatile memory, clock circuit and the power supply in order to provide larger non-volatile memory capacities for storage of temperature data and interfaces to different types and sizes in one embodiment, and in other embodiment further excludes the output drive and protection circuit in order to facilitate the use of higher power solid state switch.
8. An electronic multi-point temperature control unit comprising:
 - a plurality of electronic thermostat control units as claimed in claim 1, having a common non-volatile memory that stores reference and calibration data, for controlling the temperature in the required number of places in the refrigeration/heating systems, wherein
 - the outputs from the control latch units of the said electronic thermostat units are connected to logic circuit which selectively connects the outputs to one or more Output Drive and Protection



Circuits using the data stored separately in the non-volatile memory of the electronic thermostat unit, the said Output Drive and Protection circuits drive and monitor the load, through solid state switches,

- a central control unit connected to:
 - i each of the said outputs from the control latch units of electronic thermostat control units and the inputs of the said output drive and protection circuits for enabling or disabling the said electronic thermostat control units and output of said drive and protection circuits depending upon the combination of the output from the electronic thermostat control unit and the user control input received from the potentiometer or digital counters, as well as the occurrence of fault conditions.
 - ii. a system timers unit which generates the timing signals for enabling/disabling one or more of the said Output Drive and protection circuits during special modes of operation,
 - iii. a starting relay circuit which provides the signals required to control one or more output drive and protection circuits at the time when the said load is to be switched on.
- 9. An electronic multi-point temperature control unit as claimed in claim 8 wherein any one or more of the output drive and protection circuit includes a thermal protection circuit, an over-current protection circuit and a 'Soft Start' circuit, the thermal protection circuit monitors the temperature of the load, while the over-current protection circuit monitors the current drawn by the load, and the 'Soft Start' circuit provides an effective reduced voltage start-up to the load during the initial period of the turn-on and thereby decreases the in-rush current stress produced on the load in the case of motor and heater loads.
- 10. An electronic multipoint temperature control unit as claimed in claim 8 wherein a Central Control Unit is a Logic circuit for implementing special functions e.g. Automatic Defrost and Quick-Freeze in the case of Refrigerators, and Timed Heating Cycles in case of Heating Systems.
- 11. An electronic multi-point temperature control unit as claimed in claims 1 and 8 wherein a clock oscillator is provided for the timing signals



necessary for the operation of each circuit element of the electronic thermostat control unit.

12. An electronic digital thermostat control unit as claimed in claims 1 and 8 wherein the power supply used for powering the electronic digital thermostat control unit preferably consists of a low loss capacitive voltage dropping network followed by a voltage clamping device, a rectifier and a filter network to provide a D.C. voltage.
13. An electronic digital thermostat control unit as claimed in claims 1 and 8 wherein the temperature display unit is connected to one of the inputs of the said digital comparator(s) which receives its input from the output of the sensitivity and offset correction circuit and a selection switch permits the selective display of either the sensed temperature or the reference value from the digitized output from the potentiometer/switch in case of the electronic thermostat control unit and in case of electronic multipoint temperature control unit it is connected to the output of one of the said electronic thermostat control units for displaying the sensed or reference temperature through the selection switch.
14. An electronic multi-point temperature control unit as claimed in claim 8 wherein at least one user control switch is connected through a switch debounce circuit and a digital counter to the input of the said central control unit for providing the user control signal required to operate the said electronic multi-point temperature control unit.
15. An electronic multi-point temperature control unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the entire control circuit is implemented as a custom Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC), to provide a miniature and cost effective thermostat excluding the sensors of the electronic thermostat control units, variable user control switch(es), selector switch, temperature display unit and solid state switches.
16. An electronic multi-point temperature control unit as claimed in claim 1 wherein the said ASIC excludes non-volatile memory, clock circuit and the power supply in order to provide larger non-volatile memory capacities for storage of temperature data and interfaces to different types and sizes in one embodiment, and in another embodiment further excludes the output drive and protection circuit in order to facilitate the use of a high power solid state switch.