

## **CARING FOR YOUR ORGAN BLOWER**

### Is your blower an accident waiting to happen?

A recent case, in a rural parish church, where an organ blower motor burned out and could have started a fire if not detected in time, has raised some concern about the safety of organ blowers generally.

Firstly, it should be said that organ blowers are normally very reliable and cause no problems. Essentially, they consist of an electric motor, which drives a fan blade (impellor), which draws in air from outside, and drives it through the wind-trunking into the organ bellows - so there is little to go wrong.

However, like any mechanical device, an organ blower needs routine maintenance: lubrication of moving parts, wiring check, and cleaning. Maintaining the bearings is a crucial element of servicing to ensure that they do not run dry and thus overheat.

An annual check should be sufficient for a small blower in a church where there is not a great use of the organ. Some organ builders will do this when they are on a routine tuning visit but it is not strictly part of their job. Organ builders do not deal with mains electricity, so please check with the tuner to find out whether they can help or not. Otherwise, a specialist organ blower firm will do the job, on an annual contract basis if required, or a local firm. When a winding system has a humidifier fitted this should be serviced to prevent the build-up of potentially harmful infections. This is a job for someone properly qualified to service the equipment.

Some blowers are situated inside the organ and may need organ parts dismantled in order to gain access. If this is the case please always consult the organ builder/tuner first. When lubricating the bearings it is important not to overdo it so that oil spills out onto the motor itself. Please make sure that the motor is running smoothly, is cool, and adequately lubricated to last for another year or so.

Servicing an organ blower can be done by an appropriately experienced person. Some churches simply find a member of the congregation or local community who has the necessary engineering knowledge to check the bearings and the wiring, and make sure all is safe. However, it is probably best to employ a professional with a contract. This would cover a church when making an insurance claim in the unlikely event of an accident caused by their organ blower. It is also useful if the person inspecting the blower has enough familiarity with organs to know what is expected of the installation.

Although rare the blower engineer may advise that asbestos is present with the organ blower enclosure. If this is the case the church has a legal duty to act and the blower engineer should not be expected to work on the site until the area is safe. Please see <http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/guidance-advice/looking-after-your-church/health-safety-security/asbestos> for more information about asbestos and organ blowers.

The following website has some useful information about blowers and servicing, and they are very helpful if you need to contact them with any query: [www.watkinsandwatson.co.uk](http://www.watkinsandwatson.co.uk).

Other firms such as:

<http://www.bobstevenson.com/organ-blowers.shtml>;

<http://www.duplexpipeorganandblowerco.co.uk>

and Stuart Fothergill (no website) 01929 553176 are also available and you can of course contact any electrical company who should be able to do a basic service on an organ blower.

This is not a recommendation that you contact any particular company, but purely for information purposes.

If it is not known when the blower was last serviced please get someone to have a look at it and make arrangements for a regular inspection, which need not be frequent, to ensure that the blower is running safely and efficiently. A little time and money spent now might save much greater expense and trouble later.

Contact the DAC:

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