

Pro: Dustless Drywall

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We all dream of dustless drywalling?especially in a renovation job with shag carpets in the next room. So product development people are bringing sanders with vacuum attachments to the stores. If you have ever tried to vacuum up gypsum dust you may have found out that it is very abrasive stuff. I remember the motor I burned out just from picking this stuff up. So I started out leery on these new ?gadgets.? They are basically hollow pads designed for the open grid sanding material with a hose attachment on the handle. You can get them as simple pads, or as part of long aluminum poles. One manufacturer has added a water tank to filter the dust before it heads for your vac. I carefully checked the fine print on the sanding pads and, sure enough, one had a very large ?WARNING: not responsible for destroying your vac, check with the manufacturer.? I took that to the super store manager and, standing in front of a wall of Shop Vacs, I asked which one would work. He scratched his head and said any one, as long as you used an extra cloth filter over the motor. When I asked if the water filter would just send wet dust to the vac, he said he had never thought of that. There was, of course, nothing written in the Vacuum literature. I called the sanding pad company and they simply repeated what was in their literature, ?use an industrial or commercial vacuum,? but no clue as to which one. A call to Shop Vac confirmed that the cloth bag would probably get you by in a very light occasional-use situation but would not protect the motor in continual use. They had no experience with the water filter unit. They did see the need and will be bringing out a special tool-triggered Shop Vac that will be able to handle plaster dust early this winter. A drywall speciality store provided a lot more information. Their customers use the vac pad all the time, but only with a tool-triggered 7810 Vac from Porter Cable, the only unit this dealer had found that guarantees the motor for such use. As for their experience with the water filter unit? It has worked well for three years without a complaint of burning out any ordinary shop vac, but it is slow and only practical for small jobs. Portable domestic vacuums are definitely not recommended for plaster dust, but how about using a homeowner's own central vacuum unit? After a long discussion with the technical people at Beam Canada, it turns out that cyclone only systems (no filter) tend to build up the plaster dust on the fan blades and get into a problem of being out of balance. However, any system with a basic filter can work and will remain guaranteed?partially because the motor is not in the vacuum stream. The recommendation is to clean it out as soon as you are finished to prevent the fine gypsum dust from eventually working its way through the filter and then debalancing the fan blade. They would rather you stay away from the water filters?yes, they find that wet dust does clog up filters quicker.**Originally published as an article by Jon Eakes in Home Builder Magazine, the magazine of the Canadian Home Builder's Association.

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