



DEEP VACUUM PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATION

INTRODUCTION

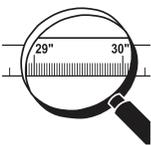
With deep vacuum, we are sure of our results before we leave the job. No more waiting to see if we get a call back to determine the results of our work. Deep vacuum is the only method we can use to tell us, for sure, that a system is thoroughly dry and free of noncondensables and leaks.

MEASURING EVACUATION - MICRONS OR INCHES?

A micron is a measurement of pressure starting from a perfect vacuum (no pressure) expressed in linear increments. One inch equals 25,400 microns. It should be noted at this point that when we discuss vacuum in terms of microns, we are referring to total absolute pressure as opposed to gauge pressure. Besides using a more accurate unit of measure (you can't read fractions on a bourdon tube type gauge), we are also starting from the same measuring point (theoretical perfect vacuum).

What Is A Micron

1/25,400 of
an inch



The bourdon tube type gauge, you will also remember, uses atmospheric pressure as its reference point, which is constantly changing during the day. The weather forecaster always includes this reading, barometric pressure, along with the temperature. When an area is covered by a HIGH, it translates into high barometric pressure and vice versa for a LOW.

PUMPS AND HOW TO SELECT THEM

Deep vacuum pumps are the first item to come to mind when we think of vacuum tools. Unfortunately the first mistake is usually made in the selection of these pumps with reasoning that goes like this— "The larger the pump I get, the faster I can do the job." Pump capacity has very little to do with evacuation time in refrigeration systems, as is easily seen when we examine the following.

The refrigeration system itself is constructed of several feet of small diameter tubing with return bends and metering devices to offer restriction during evacuation. Compound this with the fact that service valves, when provided, have 1/4" male flare ports which only have a 3/16" orifice.

We also know that the only way to get more flow through a given orifice is by increasing the pressure across that orifice. But does a pump create pressure that increases the flow? No. We tend to forget two basic principles. A vacuum pump creates a void toward which the system pressure flows. The second point is that as pressure decreases in the system during evacuation, flow decreases. Therefore, it's impossible for us to increase pressure or flow through our gauge ports with a larger pump.

Pumps in the 1-1/2 to 10 CFM class are adequate to handle 99% of our work. As a rule of thumb, the CFM rating squared equals the maximum system tonnage.

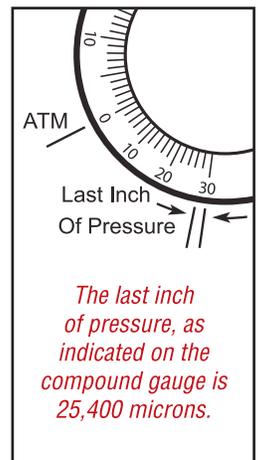
A 7 CFM pump is rated for 49 tons; 3 CFM pump is rated for 9 tons. They are all that should be purchased for service and installation. In many cases, depending on the system line sizes of large tonnage systems, it is better to put two or more of the small, easily handled pumps at different locations. This will overcome some of the pressure drop problems and actually be faster than a single large pump.

PUMP CONSTRUCTION

Rotary vane deep vacuum pumps are readily available and are best suited for our work. Piston type pumps, because of the clearance necessary between piston and head, are incapable of producing a deep vacuum or at best are very inefficient. Many single stage compressors, similar to a hermetic compressor will not evacuate a system into a micron range, the last inch of pressure on the compound gauge, nor will it condense any moisture vapor in the system.

Two stage pumps (2 pumps in series) have the best record in our business because they are capable of producing consistently lower pressures and are much more efficient when removing moisture vapor. The pump should be equipped with a blank-off valve which allows us to perform the isolation test (pressure rise) which is required in deep vacuum procedures.

The gas ballast feature should be on all pumps for refrigeration. At the beginning of evacuation, water vapor is quickly removed and if a system is laden with moisture, can very quickly contaminate the oil. Through the gas ballast, a fine metering valve connected to the second stage of the pump, a small amount of relatively dry ambient air is admitted to help prevent the moisture vapor from condensing in the oil.

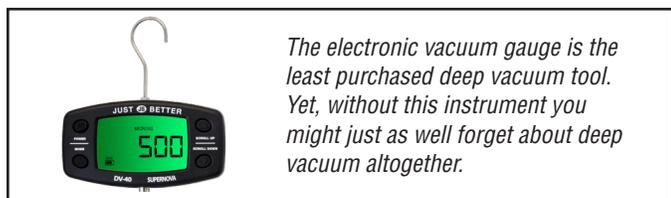


So far, we have defined our pump requirement as follows: 2-stage, rotary vane; blank-off valve; gas ballast valve; 1-1/2 to 10 CFM. A system is evacuated to between 300 and 400 microns so obviously these pumps should be able to produce vacuum in the low micron range with a safety factor of at least 25 microns total absolute. Thus, the pump should be able to achieve vacuum readings of at least 25 microns total absolute. We should also look for light weight and rugged construction because we all know the vacuum pump will be at our side as we climb those ladders to the roof top.

Finally, when checking out pumps, look at safety. Belt driven units should never be used without belt guards—if you don't give a darn about your own fingers, etc., give children and others exposed a chance. Hospitals and court rooms around the world are full because of this negligence.

THE ELECTRONIC VACUUM GAUGE

Coupled with good procedures which we will get into later, the electronic gauge tells us positively that we have a noncondensable and a leak free system. In general these gauges are heat sensing devices, in that the sensing element which is mechanically connected to the system being evacuated generates heat. The rate at which this heat is carried off changes as the surrounding gases and vapors are removed. Thus, the output of the sensing element (either thermocouple or thermistor) changes as the heat dissipation rate changes. This change in output is indicated on a meter which is calibrated in microns of mercury.



The electronic vacuum gauge is the least purchased deep vacuum tool. Yet, without this instrument you might just as well forget about deep vacuum altogether.

Evacuation is complete when a system holds at 500 microns. The compound gauge only indicates that a vacuum is being produced. The vacuum gauge on the other hand, is the only tool for accurately reading that low pressure.

VACUUM GAUGE SELECTION AND ACCURACY

The most important feature of all is range. If the vacuum gauge only indicates from 50 to 1,000 microns, you will not be able to determine whether you are pumping against a leak or against moisture. Look for an instrument that reads from 50 microns to at least 9,000 microns.

A digital display with easily read numbers gives you instant and continuous readout, whereas a gauge with color-coded lights, displays the reading "within a range" of microns. You have a "wait" period to see whether the system is going up or down in microns.

Portable vacuum gauges typically operate from battery power and should have a low battery sensor. Some models have AC adapter capability so you won't run out of power on the job.

Another feature to look for is a sturdy case to protect the instrument. Finally, when you buy instruments of this type, remember that you are really only buying answers, and the instrument should give you these answers quickly and accurately. You get paid for adjusting refrigeration systems, not your tools.

As already noted, we are talking about accuracy when we talk about micron type gauges. Gauge accuracy is affected by two factors. Extreme temperatures especially with exposure to the summer sun on a hot roof top or pavement and sensor contamination.

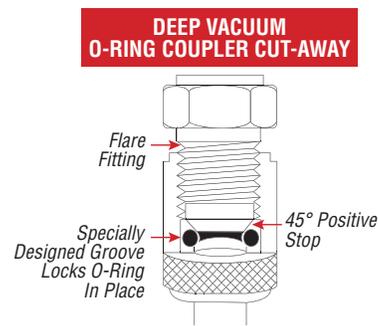
The vacuum sensor is factory calibrated on air. If refrigerant gas or oil is drawn into the vacuum sensor of a remote reading unit or unit connected to the pump during the system evacuation, the gas will cause an erroneous reading. Any oil entering into the vacuum sensor via hose will also affect gauge accuracy. Improper shut down of pump after evacuation and loss of power will suck back oil and contaminate the hose and vacuum gauge.

A hose used for charging or testing will contain droplets of system oil spurted into the hose when the schrader valve is opened. If this same hose is used on the hookup to the gauge, oil will collect in the gauge sensor. This can be prevented by using a dedicated hose, preferably O-Ring type, for evacuation.

EVACUATE THROUGH THE GAUGE MANIFOLD

Evacuate through the gauge manifold if, and only if, it is O-ring sealed, piston construction. Other types leak under vacuum. Next look at the design of the center port. In order to handle the full capacity of both the high and low side, the center intake should have double size flow path throughout its length. All J/B 1/4" manifolds have this feature.

We suggest the fitting be replaced with a 3/8mf x 1/8mp. You will now have a full flow 3/8" to the vacuum pump. You also have the option of using the M4-Series manifold which is designed to evacuate, charge or test a system without disconnecting hoses and features a 3/8" fitting.



LEAK-PROOF HOOK-UP

Deep vacuum has its own unique properties which requires leak-proof design not only in the manifold but in all components. The only connecting lines that are absolutely vacuum tight are soft copper tubing or flexible metal hose. Charging and testing hoses are designed for pressure. Even with the advanced technology of today's hoses, permeation through the hose compound still exists. When checking pressure rise, the atmosphere will permeate to the lower pressure in the hoses and the micron reading will slowly rise.

Another source of leakage is the gasket seal in valve and hose couplers. This seal is designed for charging and will not give a perfect seal required in deep vacuum service. An O-ring seal coupler, such as that made by J/B, forms around irregularities in the flare fitting. When the coupler is screwed down, we get a metal to metal seat and the o-ring lays around the lip of the flare to give a positive seal.

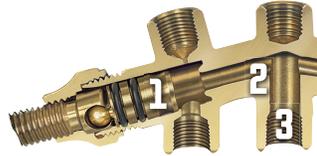
CONNECTING LINES

We have now covered the simplest hookup to this point; gauge manifold with two 1/4" I.D. connecting lines to the system and a 3/8" connection to the pump via line or fittings. Much has been said and written regarding line size, which would lead us to believe the bigger line we connect, the faster job we'll do. This would be true except for the compressor's service valves 3/16" orifice. Therefore, we only need to keep the connecting lines' I.D. larger than 3/16" This is one of the limiting time factors in evacuation.

Evacuation should always be done from both the low and high sides of the system. This could save as much as 3/4 of the time when evacuating from only one side.

Short connecting lines will save some time; however, not nearly what some maintain. In relation to the lengths of tubing in the system, we add very little restriction via connecting lines.

JB PISTON TYPE MANIFOLDS



1. Stem seats retract completely from flow path.
2. Double size flow path throughout length of center port.
3. Convert to 3/8" port with 3/8mf x 1/8mp

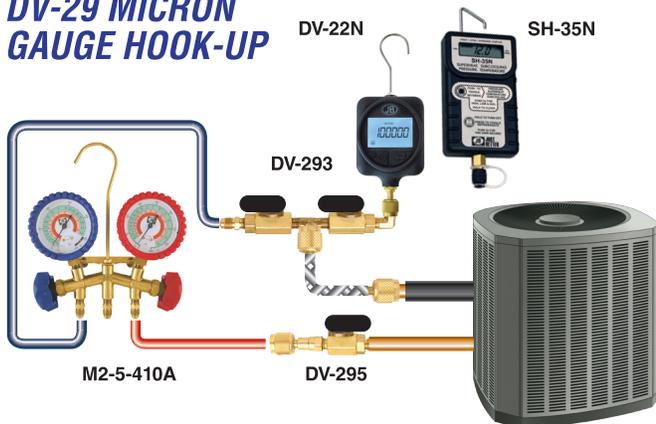
BEFORE YOU START

It is a good idea to attach the vacuum gauge to the vacuum pump to make sure the pump pulls down to at least 50 microns. If it doesn't, your pump is contaminated and the oil should be changed. Do not shut-off the blank-off valve on the pump and expect the gauge to hold a vacuum as the gauge will fall back to atmosphere. The reason for this is that the sensor is too close to the pump and the gauge's sensor doesn't have time to equalize.

MOST LEAK-PROOF VACUUM GAUGE HOOP-UP

The most leak-proof setup is by using the DV-29. This unit creates a closed system eliminating any leakage under deep vacuum.

DV-29 MICRON GAUGE HOOP-UP



DV-29 CREATES A CLOSED ENVIRONMENT TO CHECK FOR SYSTEM LEAKS

1. Works with all vacuum gauges
2. No Additional equipment needed
3. Leak-proof components

The DV-29 test unit (see illustration) eliminates other problems when attaching the vacuum gauge into the system. If the vacuum gauge is attached directly to the vacuum pump or with 3' dedicated hose, we will get a lower reading as the gauge is sensing what the pump is doing and not what the pump is doing to the system.

DISPELLING THE ARGUMENT OF "NO DEEP VAC ON HEAT PUMPS, ETC."

The word "sublimation," the ability of moisture to go directly from solid ice to vapor without passing through a liquid state, is commonly used in vacuum.

This phenomenon is observed when the wash is hung out in the winter and freezes solid. Still, in time it dries due to sublimation (drying). If lines are in a cold ambient, it is possible to have ice in the system. It will be removed during evacuation. Of course, the addition of heat (heat gun only) at these cold spots speeds up the job.

GENERAL VACUUM GAUGE HOOK-UP

When designing your hook-up system, choose from the following hoses, valve and coupler designed for leak-proof service in a deep vacuum environment:

1. D10436 or D10427 1/4" Metal Hose and D10636 or D10660 3/8" Metal Hose with o-ring couplers. Your hook-up through manifold, pump and if desired, to the vacuum gauge.
2. A34000 Quick Coupler Tee w/o-ring seal. Since the most accurate reading is obtained at the compressor's high or low side, use to tee-off the gauge.
3. D10162 ball valve with O-ring quick coupler to valve off gauge before charging. Depending on the gauge, it should be remembered that the electronic gauge's sensors will not take pressure beyond 1 to 100 pounds. Depending on hook-up, use with metal hose or A34000 coupler.

PRESSURE RISE TEST

We previously mentioned that the only difference between deep vacuum and the methods of the past is that we can measure what we have done. This is called the Pressure Rise Test.

When the sensor reads between 300 and 400 microns:

- **DV-29 Method - Blank-off the high and low side ball valves attached to the system.**
- **General Hookup Method - This includes using copper tubing or metal hose to the high and low side. Close blank-off valve on the pump. This will isolate the gauge from the pump.**

Wait for at least 5 to a maximum of 20 minutes to allow system pressure to equalize. The reading you see at the end of this test will be very close to what you actually have in the system. A rapid rise during this test to atmospheric pressure indicates a leak, while a slower rise to around 1500 microns indicates moisture is present.

READINGS AFTER 5-20 MINUTES

UNDER 500 MICRONS

Evacuation Complete

SLOW RISE TO 1500 MICRONS

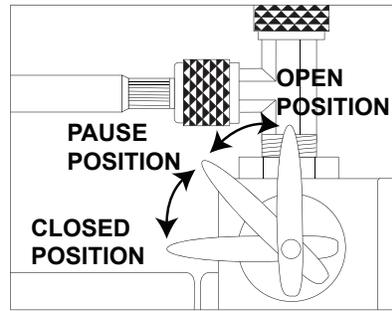
Moisture

RAPID RISE TO ATM

Leak

There are many evacuation level recommendations including the statement “evacuate the system to below 200 microns.” This should not be considered. Note we say “system” because it is possible to evacuate piping or some component other than the compressor to below this level. Refrigeration oil has a vapor pressure and by going below 200 microns, you will degas particles of the refrigeration oil. By changing the makeup of the oil, it will no longer be a true lubricating oil.

PREVENTING “HARD START-UP”



After closing the isolation valve, open the gas ballast valve and shut the pump off.

EVACUATION BRINGS OUT THE WORST IN A SYSTEM!

Remember, hydrofluoric and hydrochloric acids, and their pal, moisture, do collect in the oil. Having nothing but time on their hands, they effectively destroy pull down and act as an abrasive on internal surfaces. If left sitting in an idle pump, these culprits keep busy by rusting and corroding internal surfaces. Deep vacuum pumps need a fill or two for every job.

In order for your pump to pull a near perfect vacuum, oil must be clean and moisture free throughout evacuation. Just take a few minutes during and after each job to drain, flush and refill. Keep your pump running at peak performance and maintenance free for years to come.

Always store your vacuum equipment plugged or capped to prevent contamination due to condensation and dirt. Because a slight cut or dirt on the o-ring seals can cause leaks, the mating flare fitting faces should be wiped and checked for damage before hookup. Vacuum pump oil makes a fine lubricant at these connections.



JB INDUSTRIES