FastCap Magnetic Dust-Barrier Door

by Steve Greenberg

It's always been a good idea to contain dust when working in a client's home, but thanks to the RRP rule, it's now the law. In my RRP class, we learned how to use overlapping flaps of plastic to make doors for our dust enclosures, but I quickly graduated to glue-on zipper-style doors, which do a better job. Still, they're clumsy to use and can bind or even fall off — so I was intrigued when I first saw FastCap's new magnetic barrier door (888/443-3748, fastcap.com) at the *JLC* Live show last spring.

This door is made of a tent-like nylon fabric, and hangs like a divided curtain from a cross bar that attaches to a pair of aluminum poles. Semiflexible magnets are sewn from top to bottom along the inner side of each flap. A second set of magnets is sewn into the inside corner at the base. When you walk through the door, there's nothing to unclip or unzip; you simply part the flaps and go through, and they automatically close behind you, thanks to the magnets — which stick not only to each other but to another magnet centered on the bottom threshold bar.

Setup

Setting up the door is easy (videos on the manufacturer's website clearly describe the process). First, we put up our main plastic dust wall, supporting it with old photographic background stands **(1)**. Next, we set up a pair of FastCap's Third Hand steel poles, plumbing them in both directions as if framing up a door. These supports are included in the $200 door-system kit, but a $100 version is available if you don't need them.

The door's threshold and header bars are designed to clip to the uprights; when the header bar is at the right height, the dust door flaps should reach the center of the lower bar. Once the door is in place, a T-shaped cut needs to be made in the barrier wall behind the door, so that about 3- to 4-inch-wide flaps of plastic remain inside the steel uprights **(2)**. These plastic flaps get wrapped around the upright poles, and are held in place with long flexible strip magnets supplied with the door.

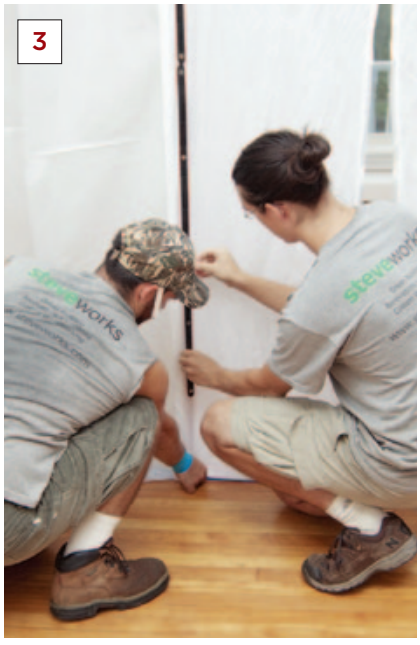
Potential Problems

The doors work best when the door supports are plumb and level and the plastic barrier is taut. You also need adequate ceiling clearance; on a recent project with a low ceiling, our top header bar was pushed up tight against the pump clamps on the uprights, and as a result the door dragged a bit on the floor.

After using the door the first time, we followed the

advice of the online training video and rolled the door up around the top bar before putting it into the storage bag. But when we did this, the magnets rolled up too — and they didn't really unroll the next time I set up the door. I had to adjust each individual magnet to get it in the right place for the flaps to catch, and then give the flexible magnets time to "relax" so that everything worked as designed. Since these flexible magnets seem to be the key to making the door close and seal tightly, they ought to be either stronger or larger.

The regular strip magnets that are used to hold the door flaps to the supports **(3)** and the plastic from the dust wall to the upper header bar work fine, though — they're plenty "sticky." For storage, they can be left attached to the bars or stacked together.



Part of a System

Once the door has been tweaked to hang correctly, it does a pretty good job of containing dust, especially when we avoid using dust-generating tools near the opening. To improve enclosure performance, we usually set up a window fan, which creates negative pressure within the containment area and helps draw the door flaps closed. We also put down a tack mat (877/800-3723, certifiedrenovatorstore.com) at the entrance, which cleans the bottom of our shoes and prevents dust from getting tracked around **(4)**.

Our magnetic dust door was really put to the test on one recent job where the client was convinced our dust was causing him to sneeze constantly. We assured him that with our barrier, dust door, negative air-pressure fan, and sticky pad, we were doing everything we could. After three days, we were finishing up and the client was glad to see us go. When he once again remarked about our dust, I asked him if he would take a close look at a small framed picture that had been on a table next to our work area for the duration of the project. I asked, "Can you see any dust on the glass?" "Not at all," he replied.

Must have been the pollen.

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