INTEGRAL VACUUM FAN HOUSING

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ABSTRACT
A filter box for a surface maintenance machine incorporating aspects of a fan housing. In one example, a filter box for a sweeping machine is provided with an impeller fan housing beneath a cylindrical filter. Operation of the impeller fan draws air from a debris hopper, through the cylindrical filter, and through an expansion chamber defined by a scroll conduit prior to outlet to atmosphere.
FIG. 7
FIG. 13
Comparison between an unhoused blower and a blower in a housing having an axial expansion chamber.
INTEGRAL VACUUM FAN HOUSING

RELATED APPLICATIONS
[0001] This application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) from provisional U.S. Patent Application No. 60/893, 373 filed Mar. 6, 2007 the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD
[0002] The present disclosure is directed to filtration systems for mobile surface maintenance machines. More specifically, the present disclosure is directed to a filtration system utilizing a filter housing defining a vacuum fan housing.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION
[0003] Over the years various kinds of machines have been developed for cleaning and maintaining floors inside buildings, and paved outdoor areas such as streets, sidewalks and parking lots. They include such machines as rotary broom sweepers, vacuum sweepers, scarifiers, burnishers, polishers and scrubbers. For our purposes here they can be divided into machines which apply water to the surface being maintained and machines which operate dry. We are concerned with the latter, which would include many vacuum sweepers, scarifiers, and rotary broom sweepers. They all share one problem which is addressed by this invention. In their normal operation they tend to stir up dust from the surface being maintained. If it is not controlled, this dust is highly objectionable.

[0004] On many of these machines the problem has received one general solution. The functional tool which generates the dust, such as a rotary broom, a scarifier head, or a vacuum pickup, is provided with a cover and surrounded by walls which have rubber skirts that hang down almost to the surface being maintained. An onboard exhaust blower continuously pulls air from the tool chamber thus created so there is a sub-atmospheric air pressure within it which eliminates outflow of dusty air from under the skirts. The blower exhausts this air to atmosphere. One or more air filters are placed in this air path, either upstream or downstream from the blower, to remove dust from the air before it is released so the discharge to atmosphere will be dust free.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION
[0005] The present invention is directed to a filtration system for a mobile surface maintenance machine utilizing a filter housing defining a vacuum fan housing. In one example, the filter box is external to the debris hopper. One or more filters are provided within a filtration system. The filter(s) can be cylindrical filters. The filter box also defines a vacuum impeller housing for efficiently drawing air through the cylindrical filter(s). In one embodiment, the debris hopper can be lifted away from the filter box, such as during a dumping procedure. In one embodiment, the external filter box is provided with selective communication with the debris hopper to allow dust and debris to move out of the filter box and be deposited within the debris hopper. The selective communication can include one or more flaps which respond to pressure variations across the flap in order to open or close the flap.

[0006] The foregoing has outlined rather broadly the features and technical advantages of the present invention in order that the detailed description of the invention that follows may be better understood. Additional features and advantages of the invention will be described hereinafter which form the subject of the claims of the invention. It should be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the conception and specific embodiment disclosed may be readily utilized as a basis for modifying or designing other structures for carrying out the same purposes of the present invention. It should also be realized by those skilled in the art that such equivalent constructions do not depart from the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims. The novel features which are believed to be characteristic of the invention, both as to its organization and method of operation, together with further objects and advantages will be better understood from the following description when considered in connection with the accompanying figures. It is to be expressly understood, however, that each of the figures is provided for the purpose of illustration and description only and is not intended as a definition of the limits of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS
[0007] For a more complete understanding of the present invention, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawing, in which:

[0008] FIG. 1 is a perspective illustration of one embodiment of a cleaning machine utilizing a filter cleaning system in accordance with the present invention.

[0009] FIGS. 2 and 3 are perspective illustrations of the prefilter chamber and filter box of the cleaning machine of FIG. 1.

[0010] FIG. 4 is an enlarged portion of FIG. 3 contained within circle C4.

[0011] FIG. 5 is a perspective illustration of the prefilter chamber and filter box of FIG. 1.

[0012] FIG. 6 is an enlarged portion of FIG. 5 contained within circle C6.

[0013] FIG. 7 is a perspective view of a cover component of the embodiment of FIG. 1.

[0014] FIG. 8 is a perspective view of a housing of the embodiment of FIG. 1.

[0015] FIG. 9 is a perspective view of a filter and filter shaker mechanism of FIG. 1.

[0016] FIG. 10 is a cross sectional view of portions of FIG. 9.

[0017] FIG. 11 is a perspective illustration of the machine of FIG. 1.

[0018] FIG. 12 is a depiction of components of FIG. 1 during operation.

[0019] FIGS. 13 and 14 are depiction of a filter box and prefilter during machine operation.

[0020] FIGS. 15-21 illustrate aspects of the vacuum fan housing of the machine FIG. 1.

[0021] FIG. 22 illustrates test data comparison.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION
[0022] A conventional forward throw rotary broom sweeper will be used by way of example in the following description of the invention. However, it should be understood that, as already stated, the invention could as well be applied to other types of mobile surface maintenance machines, such as, for example, other types of rotary broom sweepers, scarifiers, and various types of vacuum sweepers.
With reference to Fig. 1, there is shown an industrial sweeping machine 10. As illustrate, machine 10 is a forward throw sweeper with an intended direction of motion indicated by arrow marked FM. Machine 10 could as well be an over-the-top, rear hopper sweeper, a type which is also well known in the art. Machine 10 has a rotating cylindrical brush 12 for sweeping debris from a floor or other surface into a debris hopper 13. Hopper arms (not shown) allow hopper 13 to be lifted during a dumping procedure. The brush chamber generally encloses brush 12 under skirts 14 to control air flow around brush 12. The skirts 14 largely contain within the brush chamber any dust stirred up by the brush 12. To complete the dust control there is a suction blower or vacuum fan 15 which exhausts air from the brush chamber to atmosphere in an airflow path shown by the arrows in Fig. 1. Vacuum fan 16 is housed within filter box 18 and includes an impeller which is driven by the machine’s hydraulic system. Vacuum fan 16 maintains a sub-atmospheric pressure within the brush chamber so that air is drawn in under the skirts rather than flowing out. Thus relatively little dust escapes from around skirts 14. During operation, vacuum fan 16 draws debris and dust-entrained air through prefilter 17 and filter 19 contained within filter box 18 prior to exhaust. Prefilter 17 is located within debris hopper 13 and is separated from filter box 18 during, for example, a debris hopper 13 lift and dump operation. Shaker mechanism 40 is provided on filter box 18. Periodic activation of shaker mechanism 40 releases debris filter 19 to dissolve dust and debris. Various components of machine 10 have been left out of Fig. 1, e.g., the drive engine, housings and operator station have been omitted to improve understanding of the aspects of the present invention. Additional examples of surface maintenance machine suitable for adaptation in accordance with the present invention are found in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,254,146 and 5,303,448, each patent being incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.

Fig. 2 is a perspective view of prefilter 17 and filter box 18. Filter box 18 houses cylindrical filter 19 as described in more detail hereinbelow. Dust and debris-laden air is drawn by vacuum action into prefilter openings 20. Together the prefilter 17 and filter box 18 remove dust and/or debris from the air stream so the vacuum fan 16 will exhaust relatively clean air to atmosphere during machine 10 operation. Prefilter 17 may comprise a bank of cyclonic filters through which dusty air passes causing separation and retention of at least some of the larger dust particles and debris. Additional features of the prefilter 17 assembly can be found by reference to U.S. Ser. No. 60/893,560, entitled “Counter Rotating Cyclonic Filter”, and incorporated by reference herein.

In a preferred embodiment, filter box 18 includes a cylindrical pleated media filter 19, such as are manufactured, for example, by Donaldson Company, Inc. of Minneapolis, Minn. Filter 19 has a pleated media, with the pleats running parallel to the centerline of the cylinder, which makes them vertical when installed as shown. The pleated media is surrounded with a perforated metal sleeve for structural integrity. Outside the metal sleeve may be provided a fine mesh screen (not shown) to prevent any dust from a slipper which stops the counter dust and sheds it easily during a filter cleaning cycle. The ends of the cylindrical filter are open. Other filter technologies could be utilized in alternative embodiments of filter box 18.

A preferred example of the invention utilizes a cylindrical pleated media filter. However, the invention will accommodate air filters of other types. An alternative design includes two or more flat panel pleated media filters, and other known types of air filters may also be successfully employed. These might include, for example, cloth filters formed into bags, envelopes or socks, which are well known types of filters in the field of air filtration.

As shown in Fig. 3, filter box 18 has an intake opening 22 at the front of the machine 10 to admit air from the prefilter assembly 17. As illustrated a flexible coupling, such as foam, is utilized to provide fluid communication between prefilter 17 and filter box 18. Dust and debris captured by filter box 18 is removable via a lower debris outlet port 23. Filter air is directed out of filter box 18 at air outlet 24. Upon deactivation of the vacuum system, an accumulation of dust and debris passes through a seal at debris outlet port 23 and into the machine hopper 13 (not shown). During machine 10 operation, this the debris outlet port seal is kept closed by vacuum action. Filter box 18 includes vacuum fan motor 30 which is coupled to the vacuum impeller (not shown).

Fig. 4 is an enlarged portion of the filter box 18 showing details of shaker mechanism 40 as indicated by circle, C4, in Fig. 3. A hinged cover plate 41 is secured on top of filter box 18 by two hinge assemblies 42 and two clamp assemblies 43. When clamp assemblies 43 are released, cover plate 41 and connected components rotate about the hinges 42 to allow access into filter box 18. Cover plate 41 has a large generally rectangular opening in it corresponding to the general location of the cylindrical filter 19.

Shaker mechanism 40 also includes an electric motor 44 coupled to an eccentric mass 45. Electric motor 44 is coupled to a shaker plate 47 which engages the top of filter 19. Shaker mechanism 40 also includes a vibration-isolating motor mount assembly which permits shaker plate 47 to vibrate generally independently relative to cover plate 41 during a filter shaking procedure.

Referring to Fig. 5, the motor mount assembly includes a motor clamp 50, motor saddle 51, and a pair of slide plates 52 secured to upwardly directed flanges 53 of hinged cover plate 41. Electric motor 44 and eccentric mass 45 have been removed in this illustration. Fig. 6 is an enlarged portion of the filter box 18 assembly showing details of shaker mechanism 40 as indicated by circle, C6, in Fig. 5.

Motor 44 is secured between motor clamp 50 and saddle 51. Saddle 51 is rigidly coupled to shaker plate 47. Saddle 51 is movably coupled to slide plates 52 via a pair of fasteners 61. In this example, fasteners 61 are free to move within slots 62 to permit a generally vertical displacement of the saddle 51, clamp 50, motor 44 and eccentric mass 45 during a filter shaking procedure. Washers 64 slide against slide plates 52 as limited by slots 62.

Fig. 7 illustrates hinged filter cover plate 41 and slide plates 52. Fasteners (not shown) pass through openings 71 and secured slide plates 52 to flanges 53 of cover plate 41. Slots 62 extend through generally equally sized openings in slide plates 52 and flanges 53. In one example, slide plates 52 are of a durable material with substantially improved wear resistance relative to cover plate 41.

Fig. 8 illustrates housing housing 80 of filter box 18 and filter box cover 81. Cover 81 is secured to housing 80 in this example via threaded fasteners. Pin-shaped components 82 are included within hinge assemblies 42 and support cover plate 41 and connected components when cover plate 41 is opened, such as during a filter exchange.

Fig. 9 illustrates components of shaker mechanism 40 and filter 19. In this example, shaker plate 47 is in generally
direct contact with one end of filter 19. The opposite end of filter 19 is supported by a base within housing 80 (not shown). Upper annular seal 90 and lower annular seal 91 control air flow through top of filter 19.

[0035] FIG. 10 illustrates a cross-sectional view of the shaker mechanism 40 and filter 19 of FIG. 9 in an operational orientation. Top cover 100 is held between a top surface of filter 19 and is in pressure contact with shaker plate 47. Upper annular seal 90 is in contact with a lower surface of hinged cover plate 41. Forces generated during rotation of motor 44 and eccentric mass 45 are directly applied to the top of filter 19 and cause filter 19 to shake and dislodge dust and debris on filter 19 surfaces.

[0036] FIG. 11 illustrates hinged cover plate 41 and connected components in an operational orientation, such as during inspection or replacement of filter 19. Clamp assemblies 43 include knobs 111 which are secured on threaded fasteners 112 held above filter box cover 81. As depicted, removal of knobs 11 from threaded fasteners 112 permits opening of cover plate 41 and access to filter 19.

[0037] FIG. 12 is a cross-sectional operational depiction of filter box 18 with airflows generally indicated by arrows. In operation, dusty airflow passes first through prefilter 17 and enters filter box 19 at intake opening 22. Air is drawn through filter box 18 upon activation of impeller 121 which is driven by vacuum fan motor 30 and exhausted toward the rear of the machine at air outlet 24. In addition to containing cylindrical filter 19, filter box 18 also defines a vacuum fan housing for drawing air through filter and conduit 131 and directing air out through conduit 132 which has an expanding cross section as conduit 132 travels from impeller 132 to outlet 24. In one example of the invention, filter box 18 is a rotationally molded polymer component.

[0041] Applicants have discovered that a closed face impeller 21 can be combined with a low cost plastic filter box housing 80 that incorporates a “three-dimensional” scroll conduit 132. The “three dimensional” scroll conduit 132 allows use of a larger diameter closed face impeller 21 in a smaller footprint. The larger diameter closed-face impeller 21 turns at a lower rpm, resulting in several advantages, including:

[0042] The hydraulic motor 30 that drives the closed face impeller 21 operates in a commonly preferred operating range of hydraulic motors. Historically, prior art machines have paid a premium price for atypical high speed hydraulic motors.

[0043] Turning the closed face impeller 21 at lower speeds produces less noise.

[0044] The closed face impeller 21 is much more forgiving in its installation compared to the open face impellers common in the industry. The scroll conduit 132 is rotocast into the filter housing thus eliminating many parts.

[0045] One advantage of an integrated plastic filter housing 80 is that it can have complex air passages and several devices can be mounted or attached within or onto the housing. This allows an inexpensive compact housing 80 to serve multiple functions including air passages, housing filter 19, housing a filter shaker mechanism 40, housing a fan impeller 21 and its motor 30, and it contains a complex shaped expansion chamber defined by scroll conduit 132.

[0046] In operation, air is drawn through filter 19 by action of vacuum fan 21. Air flows through filter 19 and then through conduit 125 and into the center of fan 21. Rotation of fan 21 causes fan to be drawn through the closed impeller. Air is expelled from the impeller 21 into expansion chamber 132. Chamber 132 serves a similar function of inverts that surround known fan assemblies but it does this in a different way. Most inverts gradually expand their cross sectional flow areas in a radial direction relative to the fan’s shaft. The air travels around this discharge into another short duct. This duct then guides the air to a transition piece mounted on the common housing where the air leaves the housing. The prior art includes fan volutes wherein the volume of the chamber expands both radially and axially relative to the fan’s shaft. In comparison, scroll chamber 132 only expands axially.

[0047] FIG. 15 is an illustration of housing 80 showing expansion chamber/scroll conduit 132 extending in generally circular fashion along a bottom portion of housing 80.

[0048] FIG. 16 is an illustration of impeller 21 and motor 30 along with impeller cover 161.

[0049] FIGS. 17-19 are cross-sectional views of the filter box housing 18 showing conduit 132.

[0050] FIG. 20 is an illustration of filter box 18 with cover 161 removed.

[0051] FIG. 21 is a cross section of filter box 18 taken through impeller 21.
FIG. 22 represents data collected during a comparison between an unhoused impeller and an impeller in a housing having an axial expansion chamber.

Although the present invention and its advantages have been described in detail, it should be understood that various changes, substitutions and alterations can be made herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims. Moreover, the scope of the present application is not intended to be limited to the particular embodiments of the process, machine, manufacture, composition of matter, means, methods and steps described in the specification. As one of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate from the disclosure of the present invention, processes, machines, manufacture, compositions of matter, means, methods, or steps, presently existing or later to be developed that perform substantially the same function or achieve substantially the same result as the corresponding embodiments described herein may be utilized according to the present invention. Accordingly, the appended claims are intended to include within their scope such processes, machines, manufacture, compositions of matter, means, methods, or steps.

What is claimed is:

1. A filter system for a mobile surface maintenance machine comprising:
   a hopper adapted to receive debris from a sweeping brush;
   and
   a filter box carrying at least one filter and a vacuum fan impeller and being externally provided relative to the hopper, said filter box being in air communication with the hopper so as to support a vacuum-based airflow through the hopper and said at least one filter.

2. The system of claim 1 wherein the vacuum fan impeller is a closed impeller.

3. The system of claim 1 wherein the filter box defines a portion of an expansion chamber which receives air from the closed impeller during operation.

4. The system of claim 3 wherein the expansion chamber is defined by an axially expanding scroll.

5. The system of claim 4 wherein the expansion chamber is center by an open conduit between the filter interior and the fan impeller center.

6. The system of claim 2 further comprising a filter shaking mechanism to dislodge dust and debris from a surface of the filter, said dust and debris accumulating on a bottom of the filter box.

7. The system of claim 3 wherein the dust and debris of the filter box are selectively passed through a conduit into the hopper.

8. The system of claim 4 wherein a movable flap, biased by operation of the vacuum fan, controls the flow of dust and debris through the conduit and into the hopper.

9. A filter housing comprising:
   a molded plastic housing having an interior volume into which a filter is disposed and defining at least a portion of a vacuum expansion chamber.

10. A filter comprising:
    an integrated filter box containing a filter, said filter box being external to a hopper of a sweeping machine;
    a filter shaking mechanism attached to the filter box; and
    an impeller attached to the filter box.

11. The filter of claim 10 wherein the filter box defines a portion of an expansion chamber surrounding at least a portion of the impeller.

12. The filter of claim 11 wherein the expansion chamber maintains a generally constant radial distance from a center.

13. The filter of claim 11 wherein the expansion chamber expands axially around the impeller blade.

14. The filter of claim 10 wherein the filter box includes a conduit between the interior of the filter and the impeller.

15. The filter of claim 10 further comprising a selectively operable duct for passing dislodged debris from the filter box into the hopper.

16. A filter comprising:
    a housing having an air inlet and a filtered air outlet;
    a filter within the housing;
    a vacuum fan connected to the housing and drawing air from the inlet toward the outlet;
    an expansion chamber at least partially molded into the housing, said expansion chamber surrounding at least a part of the vacuum fan.

17. A surface maintenance machine comprising:
    a mobile chassis having a sweeping brush;
    a hopper receiving debris thrown by the sweeping brush;
    a filter box external to the hopper and being in selective air communication therewith, said filter box carrying a filter, a shaking mechanism and a vacuum impeller.

18. The machine of claim 17 wherein the impeller is driven by a hydraulic motor.

19. A surface maintenance machine comprising:
    an integrated molded filter box external to a main debris hopper and carrying a filter and defining at least a portion of a curved expansion chamber proximate to a driven air impeller.

20. The machine of claim 19 wherein the expansion chamber is generally circular.

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