

6 MAINTENANCE

6.1 ION GUN MAINTENANCE AND CLEANING

These are general maintenance recommendations; some guns may have specific care, handling, or vacuum requirements.

HANDLING

Although the Ion Gun is quite rugged, it should be handled carefully and not knocked or dropped. Some guns have obviously-fragile ceramics and fine connections on the exterior of the gun tube; others have similar fragile parts inside the gun, which could also be damaged. Care should be taken that the gun does not hit against anything when inserting it or removing it from the vacuum chamber. On gas ion guns, the gas inlet valve could break if over-tightened. Careful handling and storage are important when the gun is out of vacuum.

GENERAL CLEANING

Optimum performance of the Ion Gun requires clean vacuum surfaces. As described in the Operating Hints, it is important to keep the gun clean by using proper handling procedures, such as wearing gloves, maintaining a good vacuum, and storing the gun properly. The system into which the gun is mounted should also be clean, including the flanges and gaskets. Dust and debris can be blown off equipment using compressed, microscopically-clean gas, such as nitrogen or a can of tetrafluoroethane. Exterior surfaces can be wiped with isopropanol and a lint-free cloth.

Before cleaning the Power Supply, ensure that the system is off and the power cord is unplugged from the AC outlet. Exterior surfaces can be wiped with a slightly damp cloth.

STORAGE

When the Ion Gun is not in vacuum, it should be stored carefully. Mounted guns can be bolted into their original stainless steel shipping tube to protect the knife edge on the flange and to keep the gun clean. Small unmounted guns and other parts can be placed in sealed bags, foil, or covered containers. The gun and other equipment which goes into vacuum should be stored on closed shelves.

Most guns can be stored in the laboratory at normal temperatures and pressures. While at room temperature, the refractory metal filaments used in gas ionization and the alkali metal cartridges used in surface ionization are not harmed by repeated exposure to atmospheric gases. However, for prolonged storage of alkali metal ion source cartridges, a container with a desiccant should be used.

BAKEOUT

Bakeout involves heating the gun while in vacuum to remove and pump away contaminants adsorbed materials, water vapor etc. that may interfere with vacuum or gun performance. **Before bakeout, all the gun cables must be removed.** In some guns, there are magnetic coils, a pneumatic Faraday cup actuator or other assemblies which are more heat-sensitive and must also be removed or heated differentially; care should be taken that these assemblies are not heated above their recommended maximum temperatures. Maximum temperatures for bakeout are given in the gun specifications. Some bakeout methods are described in the Operating Hints section 5.3.3.

ION SOURCE MAINTENANCE

As the Ion Gun is operated, insulating layers may build up on the apertures in the ion source. These insulating layers are usually formed from evaporated source material, oil, or other vacuum system contaminants. As these layers form, changes in the operating characteristics may be observed. At some point, the performance of the ion gun may deteriorate so that the ion source (firing unit assembly) requires cleaning. The best method of removing the insulating layers is to install a new ion source, which has the benefit that the ionization cathode or alkali metal cartridge is replaced at the same time.

Alternatively, the ion source may fail suddenly, due to the loss of filament or heater material over time. If the filament or heater burns out, the ion source will need to be replaced with a new or rebuilt assembly.

Ion sources can be rebuilt at Kimball Physics; a rebuilt ion source includes a new ionization cathode or alkali metal cartridge. Spare ion sources may also be purchased from Kimball Physics. Detailed gun disassembly and ion source replacement instructions are given in Section 6.3. For a few gun models, it is not recommended that users replace the ion source themselves, and no disassembly instructions are given.

POWER SUPPLY MAINTENANCE

No routine maintenance or inspection procedures are required for the power supply. However during normal operation, the user should be aware of any changes that might indicate a problem, such as excessive heat, popping sounds, fluctuating meters, etc.

The entire system, gun, ion source, or power supply can be returned to Kimball Physics for evaluation, disassembly, cleaning and rebuild; see shipping instructions in Section 2.1.

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