

## Quality ventilation is the only way for Essex installer

Changes to Part F of the Building Regulations has given rise to a new category of installer – the ventilation specialist. Assistant Editor Carol Hitchcock visits an Essex business that is helping to improve air quality and deliver energy savings for customers in London and the Home Counties.

The beginning of a recession is not usually thought of as an ideal time to start a new business, but for Dean Jones, founder of Essex-based SureVent, the time couldn't have been better. When Dean set up shop in 2008, the economic crisis was just beginning to make itself known, but the Government's interest in transforming the nation's housing stock into models of energy efficiency was already well established. Building Regulations had been revised to make buildings more airtight, and this had a knock-on effect for ventilation standards. Companies with the skill and expertise to correctly install ventilation systems were in short supply, and those who could meet the challenge found themselves with ample opportunity to work.

SureVent specialises in the installation of mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) in both new build and retrofit settings. Dean and his wife Kerry run the business, with Dean on the tools and Kerry taking care of administration. A carpenter, an electrician and a labourer are also on staff. Together, the team carry out installations in London and the Home Counties for a wide range of clients, including councils, local authorities, public and private landlords, house builders, and architects.

### Deep roots

At 54 years of age, Dean has been involved in the ventilation sector for a decade, but his experience in other trades made a real contribution to his expertise in this one. With a background that spans building, engineering and carpentry, Dean was well placed to marry up these skills into the field of ventilation.



Dean Jones with the Demonstration Box – he makes sure householders have a good understanding of the ventilation system and how it works

When Dean and Kerry talk about SureVent, their passion for delivering the best product backed up by the best service seems to consume them. "It's just ingrained in me," says Dean, "that for any job I do, it has to be done to the highest standards. If an installation requires more time than planned for, then I will happily put in the time. The only thing that matters to me is that the job is done absolutely right."

"We take a lot of pride in our work and we want our customers to know that," adds Dean. "Good ventilation systems are as much about existing and proven theory as implementation. Best practice is at the heart of everything we do at SureVent, and to me it's just as important to finish off well as it is to install well. We provide a whole package, and it's quality at every point."

Kerry mirrors Dean's tendency for perfectionism. In her administrative role, part of her job is to make sure the company is registered with quality control organisations, such as Trading Standards and ConstructionLine. She navigates the rigorous application processes and maintains the standards required for membership. "Take Trading Standards, for example," she says. "It is their policy to assess members' adherence to codes of practice on a biyearly basis. We're working very hard to keep our standards well above expectations."

Keeping abreast of health and safety is also part of Kerry's remit. "A lot of people complain about health and safety requirements, but they

are there for a good reason. They keep your staff and customers safe, and that assurance feeds in to providing a good overall service." When H&S updates come in, Kerry briefs Dean and his team on the latest news and, when required, books them on the appropriate training courses.

Both Dean and Kerry are strong believers in the idea that, if you want someone to perform to the best of their ability, you have to look after them. It's for that reason SureVent's staff is committed to CPD. "We pay for our staff to go on professional development courses because we want only the best working for us," says Kerry.

Dean adds: "CPD courses also help them to give logical answers to customer questions. They guarantee that the people representing SureVent have reached certain standards, and this gives confidence to the clients as well."

### Customer care

Much of the work SureVent performs is for organisations with large numbers of tenanted properties. This means Dean and his team often find themselves entering the homes of people who are unsure of how the ventilation system will look and perform. This is where Dean has made the extra effort to give good customer care:

"When I go in to do a survey, I carry a demonstration box with me so I can explain to the tenant exactly what we will be doing in their home, and why. It contains examples of the equipment – like the valve and ducting – as well as the encasement profile, switches and a brochure. I can sketch the plan of where the equipment will go and how it will benefit them once the system is up and running. They really appreciate being informed, and it keeps them involved in the project. Landlords like this approach, too, because the tenant happily agrees with the installation once they understand it."

### Breathe easy

One of SureVent's primary missions is to improve the quality of people's lives by improving the quality of the air they breathe. Dean takes personal satisfaction when customers come to him with feedback on the changes good ventilation has brought.

"Modern houses have to be well sealed to meet regulations," says Dean, "but this does tend to lead to problems with mould and condensation. For asthma sufferers, the very young and very old, this can be a serious problem. The fact is, proper ventilation can make a world of difference to indoor air quality and the lives of people living there. A heat recovery system ensures fresh, filtered air is supplied throughout the home."

The company behind many of SureVent's installations is Johnson & Starley, a UK heating and ventilation company with a 90 year history in the sector. The alliance forged between the two firms helps Dean ensure excellent levels of



Dean Jones balancing the controls on a Johnson & Starley Heat Recovery 155 LE during commissioning

professionalism in terms of customer service and workmanship. Commenting on their relationship, Johnson & Starley Commercial Director Sean O'Sullivan says: "SureVent pride themselves on a job well done and are at the forefront of any changes in regulations to ensure they offer the most up to date service in ventilation system performance and after sales support."

### Still going

SureVent has been operating for four years now, each year bringing new growth to the company. Part of its success can be attributed to the changes to Part F of the Building Regulations, which require adequate ventilation in all new build homes, and this has filtered down to the retrofit market. But there is no doubt that Dean's commitment to best practice in all areas of business keeps his order books full.

"We try to keep our prices competitive with a good service," he says, "so we give them 110% with a good value attached. That is how we are building our business."

At present, most of his work comes from word-of-mouth and customer recommendation, but next year he plans to expand both his staff and turnover, and is looking at a more pro-active marketing

**"Proper ventilation can make a world of difference to indoor air quality"**

approach which will involve both print and local radio advertising. Kerry has drawn up plans to advertise in the Metro newspaper on the London Underground.

"Unlike heating and plumbing issues, ventilation is not a distress purchase," says Kerry. "Customers quite often try to improvise ways of dealing with mould problems. People will decorate over mould, sometimes several times, before they realise the need for a more permanent and sustainable solution. It takes time for them to discover this. That's why it's so important to reach the customer through advertising."

Dean and Kerry have invested in a website for SureVent which explains the rationale behind ventilation systems, but advertising will reach the broader audience they need to expand the business. "We are busy enough to cope with our current customer demand," says Dean, "but this year we want to expand, so we need to advertise to support those plans."

The new year will also see SureVent working on a commercial project. The team will install a commercial heat recovery system for the canteen and toilet facilities in a large storage warehouse.



Dean's wife Kerry is responsible for the smooth running of the business

Dean picks up the story: "My roots are in pattern-making and carpentry, and this led me to start a general building company. Over the years, I found myself doing more and more jobs that incorporated ventilation, so it seemed quiet natural to specialise in this field, particularly as the Government has recognised the important role proper ventilation plays in keeping homes energy efficient and supplying a healthy indoor air quality."