Drone Valves

Drone valves may seem like an easy solution to achieving a clean cutoff. Like anything on the bagpipes…there is no easy solution ;-}
Drone valves serve a variety of purposes and as you will read they have been around since at least the mid 1800s.

Drone valves are placed at the base of the drone stock to help regulate air through the drones. Or if the piper is using a hose moisture trap, the drone valves can be in-line. The intent is to stabilize changes in bag pressure with regard to the drone reeds, so the piper has steadier sound, easier starts and crisper stops. Volume is reduced slightly. I do not recommend students first starting out on the pipes to install drone valves.

Most valves are certainly most practical with a zipper or clamp-back bag however, some allow insertion through the drone stock.

Contrary to the assumptions of many, drone valves are not a new invention, having been employed by the early 19th century and perhaps even earlier.

McDonald-made Pressure Regulators
Introduced: Before 1840

The image to the left shows a drone regulator made by Donald McDonald (a bagpipe maker) who died in 1840. The regulator was made from the same billet of wood as the accompanying stock so was turned at the same time and was not added at some later point in time.

Some of the more common drone valves include…

Shepherd Tone Enhancers
Manufacturer: R.T. Shepherd Co. of Scotland.
Introduced: Late Summer 2000

Made of black plastic. These devices contain desiccant beads to absorb moisture.

I use tone enhancers in my pipes along with a Shepherd water trap system - **I'm a wet blower**!

McCallum Drone Valves
Manufacturer: McCallum.
Introduced: 2001

These devices also contain a desiccant to absorb moisture. These are most practical with a zipper or clamp bag.

Ash Plugs
Manufacturer: Alan Ash of Canada.
Introduced: 2001

These are modeled after the McCallum valves, but have some design differences and retail at a much lower price than the McCallums.

They also drone valves to work with the Ross Canister System:

Hylands In-Line Drone Valves
Inventor/Manufacturer: Nigel Hylands and co-developer Ian Lyons, both of Melbourne, Australia
Introduced: March 2004

These valves fit in-line on most hose moisture control systems. Strength of the valve is adjustable via a hex screw located on the side of the valve collar (clockwise tightens).

I do not recommend students just starting on the pipes install drone valves. You first need to learn to strike in and cut cleanly without the valves. They can be added at any time. Check with your instructor before installing.