



Staying Clean Under Pressure

By Jeff LeCours

We all want to live in a clean, healthy and well-maintained community. Whether it is a community of single-family homes or a multi-unit complex, we live in the south and we all face the same common dilemma; everything gets dirty and moldy. Mold, mildew and many other contaminants grow everywhere around our properties. As you walk out your door, you may be greeted with dirt, spider webs or black mildew on the white trim around the siding. Vinyl siding is no exception. Even the stucco and brick can show the green mold growing. Sidewalks and other surfaces get slippery with mold. The parking garage may have oil, dirt and gum all over the parking deck. Black stains appear on roofs, wood decks get covered with mildew and coatings fail from these growing organisms. There's no ignoring it. It is there and has to be cleaned regularly. Homeowners, associations and managers alike must deal with the exterior cleaning and should do so sooner than later. How it should be cleaned and by who are two very important questions that need to be answered when it is time to clean.

BENEFITS OF PRESSURE WASHING

Preventative Maintenance

First and foremost, pressure washing is smart preventative maintenance for all exterior surfaces. Exterior washing, when done by a professional, helps

extend the life of our properties. It eliminates the contaminants that contribute to rot, decay, and the premature failing of the coatings and building materials. Cleaning of buildings, concrete, roofs and wood structures can add years to the life of these surfaces as well as save on costly repairs.

Adds Value

"Curb appeal" is a primary reason why we live where we do. A clean, safe, health hazard free property is the key ingredient to adding value to our communities. Value to residents who want to live in a clean and attractive community and value of curb appeal to those who want to sell or lease their homes.

Safety & Health

Dirt, mold, mildew, oil and the many other contaminants we find around our properties all pose risks and may pose costly safety and health issues. Proper washing can protect against such things as slip and fall accidents as well as protect against mold intrusion, allergies and other health and safety related issues.

HOW CAN WE MAKE OUR COMMUNITY BETTER?

This is a question we all should be asking, especially in a recessed economy. Following is an email excerpt from a community manager that expresses a philosophy that other communities should consider

adopting:

"We're hoping that 2009 will be a good year for our associations, even with the market as it is. Our focus with the Boards is that the good associations will continue to invest in maintaining their property, so that when the market turns around, they will stand out in the new environment ... Your power washing program is just one way that associations/Boards can accomplish this goal."

Through smart preventative maintenance programs, we can extend the life of our properties and maintain the integrity of the community.

PROPER CLEANING METHODS vs. HIGH PRESSURE EQUIPMENT & CLEANERS

There is more to pressure washing than meets the eye. Proper equipment and use of that equipment in combination with the correct cleaning compounds is the key to a property being washed properly. Pressure washing equipment has PSI ratings (pounds per square inch) of up to and over 4000 PSI. PSI is basically the pressure or force that water comes out of a pressure washing gun and tip. On many surfaces such as concrete sidewalks, parking garage decks and patios, higher PSI is needed and safe when used properly. Unfortunately many consumers and some contractors are not aware that HIGH PRESSURE should *NEVER* be used when

cleaning a home or a complex of buildings. 4000 pounds of pressure will damage most exterior building surfaces. Pressure washing equipment also has volume ratings expressed in GPM (gallons per minute). This volume helps in the cleaning and generally the more gallons per minute the quicker and more effective the cleaning process becomes. The GPM also helps in the rinsing process of washing. Usual GPM for building washing is in the range of 5-8 GPM. The higher GPM helps rinse more than the pressure. Lower GPM ratings take longer and quite often more pressure is needed to rinse. But once again HIGH PRESSURE and misuse of equipment can cause damage.

All equipment is not created equal. Obviously, equipment is an important component of any cleaning task. Machines differ, soap dispensers and applicators differ plus there are hundreds of different cleaning tips to use for application. Tip size helps control pressure, with the change of a tip you can go from 4000 PSI pressure down to a much lower and safer pressure. The average consumer would not easily recognize or appreciate the difference in the equipment options and application. The professional contract cleaner understands the component of what is termed in the industry as a "cleaning unit" and what their specific equipment is capable of delivering. Professional pressure washing companies have an assortment of choices available to properly accomplish the different projects in the course of their daily routines.

A low pressure wash with environmentally safe cleaning chemicals should be used on our exteriors. Control of water pressure on the property project is a must. Professionals know one of the most important factors in cleaning is using correct detergent mixes. The chemicals clean, not pressure. The proper cleaning compounds are a key to excellent results. The professional uses the right detergent for the specific cleaning task. Stucco isn't washed the same as vinyl siding. Painted wood isn't

washed the same as brick. In addition to correct detergent selection, using them at effective but safe concentrations to provide excellent results is a must. The professional also has the knowledge and training to know heat and cold effects, how well detergents work and will adjust concentrations based on ambient temperature. Appropriately adjusting detergent concentrations will provide excellent results in any climate. Water alone cleans very little. The proper selection and use of detergents make all the difference when cleaning all surfaces. No one cleaning chemical can clean all surfaces. Generally it's a mix of chemicals that do the job properly, depending on the surfaces to be cleaned and what needs to be cleaned off of the surfaces. From a mild soap or detergent to more aggressive butyl based cleaners, there are a wide variety of good cleaners for the professional to use. Mildicides such as bleach products kill mold & mildew. In proper concentrations bleach products are completely safe and are needed in the south where we find more than our fair share of mold & mildew. There are also specialty cleaners that are often needed. Iron rust stains on buildings, concrete and other surfaces can easily be removed with the proper acidic cleaners. Cleaners to remove black streaks from gutters can be brushed on to make gutters look new. Aggressive commercial grade degreasers are available for removing oil & grease from parking garage decks. Paint and stain strippers and wood brighteners are available for decks, fences and docks. The professional pressure washing contractor researches and uses these cleaning compounds regularly. All of these cleaners come with MSDS sheets (Material Safety Data Sheets) and should always be available so the contractor and the customer may reference them as needed. MSDS sheets list the active ingredients, health & safety precautions and contact numbers in case of emergency or questions about the products.

THE DAMAGE IS DONE

The expectations when having cleaning performed is that it not just looks cleaner, but actually is. We do not expect property to be compromised or damaged as a result of having the work done. Improper chemicals and methods can result in hundreds or thousands of dollars in payment for the initial services as well as future expenditures in remedial efforts. Damage that can occur includes aesthetic, structural and hazardous in nature, all which can lead to overages in budgeted expenses, risk management breaches and potential liability for the association. See chart on following page for damage risks.

WHO TO HIRE

As decision makers for our communities, we have the responsibility of who should be hired to clean one of our largest investments - our homes and common area assets. Sometimes property decision makers and homeowners look at exterior property cleaning as a task that their "handyman" can do. As with any maintenance issue, there are many factors to take into consideration beyond the actual cost of services.

What does a professional pressure washing contractor offer the customer? Let me take this opportunity to provide some insight and contrast the differences between a professional company and "handyman" service.

The handyman can appear in many disguises; they may be a part timer with a pressure washer in the back of a pickup, maintenance man for the property, a painter or landscaper who does pressure washing as an add-on or a handyman company that "does it all". Often the handyman will just hook up a machine and begin to blast away. This is wrong. Many intend to do a good job but unfortunately the handyman cleaner just does not have the knowledge, the years of hands-on experience or proper equipment to

(Continued on page 8)

The Damage is Done

Most of us have seen the damage that can be done by a pressure washer or improper chemical use in the hands of someone who is inexperienced or someone who just does not care and wants to make the quick buck.

- High pressure marks and scarring on buildings;
- Vinyl siding, stucco, Dryvit, composite siding & paint damage;
- Siding that is dislodged;
- Broken window seals;
- Cut window, door and patio screens;
- High pressure damage (furring, cut marks) to wood decks, fences & docks;
- Roof shingle damage, granular loss, broken shingles due to high pressure washing (only low/no chemical wash should be used on roofs);
- High pressure water intrusion causing mold issues months & years later;
- Premature reappearance of mold and mildew;
- Plant, shrub & vegetation damage;
- Concrete damage—scarring is common with improper tip use.

(Continued from page 7)
do the job properly.

Most handyman cleaners do not have insurance that covers them or you for pressure washing. They may have General Liability and Workers Compensation insurance, but if they do not specialize in exterior washing or their employees are "off the books" their insurance may not cover your property for damages or injuries that may occur. If they aren't listed in the proper category and have the proper code, their insurance may not and probably does not cover them or you for the work they are performing.

In addition to the appropriate licensing, and insurance, the professional contract cleaner possesses the attributes of experts. Professional pressure washing companies use equipment and cleaning compounds designed for the task at hand. Most importantly, they make a concerted effort to receive continuing education on

new techniques, detergents and equipment to provide you with the results you deserve.

Would you want a first year Med student or a Podiatrist performing brain surgery? OK pressure washing may not be brain surgery but I suggest that entrusting your home & property, worth hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars, shouldn't be done by just anyone with a pressure washer.

PUTTING OUT THE BID

First, save your management staff, Board or committee time by ensuring that a contractor is even qualified to bid on your project before accepting them as a bidder. The initial screeners of your bidding process should make sure all the legal and risk management minimums are met, including the contractor carrying Worker's Compensation. Without it, the association could be liable for any industrial accident that may occur.

Next, ask for and check the company references for similar projects. Photographs are great, but personally viewing a reference property is more safe proof.

When the decision is made that the property should be cleaned the bid and proposal process is important for the property & contractor to understand exactly what is required and how the project will be executed. The project bid should start with a detailed RFP (Request for Proposal) from the property showing the scope of work requested. The RFP is important to help the contractors bid on a level playing field and ensures that the contractor understands what is requested. Some managers, properties and contractors actually will work together in putting RFP's together. The professional should always be there to help a manager or property if their help is requested.

The professional contract cleaner receives the RFP and starts with an

onsite survey. The contractor takes the time to survey the project site and identifies exactly what needs to be cleaned and how it should be cleaned. They will observe any potential problem areas or safety hazards to the residents. With this data, they formulate an action plan to address the issues to do the job properly. The professional then will submit a detailed proposal to the property. After receiving the bid the property and the community manager can call and ask questions and ask for a free cleaning demonstration. The professional contractor invites questions, is willing to show or explain the processes that will be used and wants the property to feel comfortable in the choices they are making. Once again ask the contractor for their references!

As I said, there is more to washing than meets the eye. Working together as managers, properties and contractors can ensure safe completion of a project and quality results. Preventative maintenance and comfortable living is what it's all about. Find the right contractor; protect yourself, protect your property, and receive the results you deserve.

Following are some organizations, continuing educations classes, pressure washing industry business boards that are offered to help in the education and betterment of the pressure washing industry. Many professional pressure washing contractors use these resources to better serve their customers.

United Association of Contract Cleaners - www.uamcc.org
The Pressure Washing Institute - www.pressurewashinginstitute.com
Alliance Trade Services - www.AllianceTradeServices.com - Educational classes
PWNA, Pressure Washers of North America - www.thepwna.org

There are many other networking & educational events across the country. For years the pressure washing industry has held Business Round tables & and conferences. One of the most highly attended

and helpful Round Table events was right in South Carolina. The 2008 Myrtle Beach Round Table drew contractors from all over the country. The theme of the RT was Residential & Commercial Property Management "How to get and keep the work" You can read an article on the event in the Cleaner Times Magazine on line at - <http://cleanertimes.com/content.cfm?articleID=657>).

You can also find a list of upcoming pressure washing events at www.nationalcleaningexpo.com

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