



Technical Journal for High Pressure Water Applications

# Cleaner Times

MAY 2004 • \$8.00 US

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## How to **Clean** Vinyl Siding

Chemical Glossary

Fighting Fraud

Summer Sense

Working  
in Hot

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# Cleaner Times

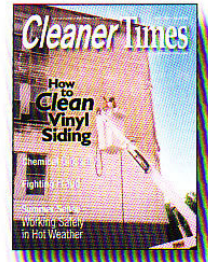
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Cover photo courtesy of Mike Cassidy,  
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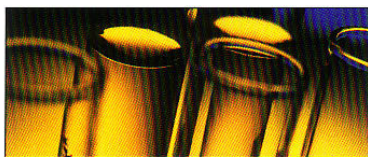
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**Cleaner Times** (ISSN #1073-9602)  
is published monthly by:

**Advantage Publishing Co., Inc.,**  
1000 Nix Road  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72211-3235  
Phone: 501-280-0007  
Fax: 501-280-9233  
www.cleanertimes.com  
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### POSTMASTER:

Send address corrections to:  
Cleaner Times  
1000 Nix Road, Little Rock, Arkansas 72211-3235  
http://www.adpub.com

**Subscription Rates:** One Year, \$36 U.S. and  
\$59 Foreign. Back issues are available for \$8.00 each.  
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*Photo courtesy of Mike Cassidy, Mobile Power Wash of New England.*

## The Bright Side of Vinyl Siding Part One

**W**e've all seen them—commercial TV salesmen hawking their wares—explaining how you can make your home look new with vinyl siding installation. Typically, an old house in bad need of fresh paint or repair will flash upon the screen. Instantly following, a lengthy panoramic scene of a beautiful, clean exterior—freshly installed—is designed to entice homeowners weary of re-painting and transform them into new customers.

Alas! What should a homeowner do after making this investment? Although frequently touted as “maintenance free,” vinyl siding is not exactly a homeowner's answer to prayers for a day spent lounging in the backyard hammock. Public opinion suggests rinsing with a garden hose to remove dust and loose dirt as

necessary. According to the Vinyl Siding Institute, most siding manufacturers recommend a gentle cleanser and light scrubbing with a soft bristled brush, if necessary, for removing stains.

One manufacturer, Rollex Corporation, suggests using one-third cup of mild detergent per gallon of water to clean moderate to heavy dirt accumulation. For getting rid of mildew, they recommend a mild household cleaner or a solution of 30% vinegar to 70% water, followed by a plain water rinse.

Stains may be removed using a mild abrasive, but Rollex warns not to rub harder than necessary, even though there is no worry about removing the finish (since the color of the vinyl goes all the way through and is not just a surface coating). Harsh scrubbing may roughen the surface of the siding and possibly cause slight changes in its appearance.

In reality, it isn't always that simple. Professional contract cleaners who specialize in cleaning vinyl siding will tell you there's much more involved. Depending on the weather and other environmental factors (heat sources, reflected light, etc.), vinyl siding can become rather soiled and require more attentive cleaning methods. Your local chemical distributor may be the most valuable asset in determining what specific cleaning solutions are effective in cleaning vinyl siding.

Michael Cassidy, owner of Mobile Power Wash of New England, explains: "Thoroughly prewet your surface and surrounding area, apply mild biodegradable cleaners, follow with manual agitation (old fashioned elbow grease) as may be required, and finish with a LOW pressure wash and final rinse. Adjust the water temperature as needed from cold to warm. Our experience has shown that if you apply the proper cleaners at the right temperature, you don't have to compensate with higher water pressure to try to force the dirt off. Periodic cleanings will ensure that your property stays in top shape." **Getting the Job and More**

Aside from a thorough inspection prior to cleaning and including notes on your written proposal, there are other factors to consider when prospecting. Until you have enough experience to automatically have an idea of "how much you'll charge," a combination pricing method may be most practical when determining an estimate for a potential customer. Use the total square feet as a guideline to get a ballpark figure, and then figure your time and material. Remember your water supply as well. If you have to carry water, it's going to cost you and your customer more.

If you provide more than one type of service (cleaning application), be sure to let your market know. Referrals from neighbors and word-of-mouth advertising can be some of your best prospecting tools.

When discussing your proposal with a prospect, remember to include add-ons or upgrades—cleaning

the sidewalk, driveway, deck, picnic tables, outbuilding, garages, play equipment, etc. Sometimes a small discount will be enough incentive for the hesitant customer. Explain that the single trip is always less expensive than making multiple visits to clean items separately. Point out the aesthetic value of the entire property being clean—an oily driveway will make your cleanest house look somewhat unkempt.

### Key Points of Cleaning Vinyl Siding

Prior to cleaning, thoroughly inspect all surfaces, noting any cracks, holes or pre-existing conditions (such as loose pieces). What is the condition of surface? Is it still shiny or is it faded and oxidized?



*Photo courtesy of Tim Ellis of Americlean.*

Check all sides as each side may have different conditions. Why does it need to be cleaned—does it have mold, mildew, dirt, or vandalism like graffiti? Note what is adjacent to the structure—is there good access? Are there attached decks? What about bushes and trees against areas to be cleaned? Flower beds, food gardens, or freshly seeded lawns can be endangered by wash-water runoff. What about screened porches? Check condition of all windows prior to prewetting the siding. Has the property been cleaned previously and, if so, how long ago and what was used? Make note of any pre-existing conditions in writing on your proposals.

Specific stains or conditions to watch for include: rust, artillery fungus, spray paint, overspray from deck sealing, run-type stains from window frames or other things attached to vinyl, bug spray stains around light fixtures near doors, scuff marks from weed whackers and tire marks, scuff marks from roof shingles dropped off roofs when house was last shingled, home heating fuel drippage from oil fill spouts, soot stains from chimney backups, melted areas from gas grills being placed too close, soot from grills used in enclosed porches, etc., bird droppings from nests located on property, bee or wasp nests residue, two-tone effects from replaced siding, concrete



*Vinyl siding before (above) and after (below) cleaning. Photos courtesy of Mike Cassidy, Mobile Power Wash of New England.*



splatter from poured concrete work adjacent to siding, abrasion marks from bushes and trees adjacent to siding, runoff from leaky gutters, and splash up from driveway sealcoating.

When prewetting the surface to be cleaned, remember to also prewet the surrounding areas (foliage, adjacent structures, etc.) to help prevent damage. Cassidy suggests that you apply cleaners using downstream injection (low pressure after the pump) to prewet surfaces from bottom to top. Keep surface from drying out while cleaner is on surface by misting lightly.

Rinse lightly with very low pressure to drop cleaner off surface so as to not force cleaner under surface of siding or into weep holes. Once this is done, you can wash surface using light pressure (500–700 psi) and use a wide fan. Keep your nozzle's distance about a foot from the surface. Use a slightly longer wand, which keeps you away from surface, but not so long that you lose control—maybe seven or eight feet long. Just experiment to see what feels good. The longer the wand, the drier you normally stay, and the larger the area you can clean without moving. Dial in the proper cleaners and never attempt to compensate with higher pressure for lack of the proper cleaners.



*Photos courtesy of Tim Ellis of Americlean.*

Russ Ellis of Americlean, Inc., who has more than ten years of experience in cleaning vinyl siding, is even more vigilant, stating that "If you aren't careful, you can blow

siding off with a couple hundred psi just standing back a little. I would use a garden hose (30-50 psi) if I could get the volume and temperature needed. Be cautious that the

siding is properly installed and is not loose prior to starting the job."

He suggests that you start on the shady side of the house in the morning, and work your way

around, staying out of the sun. The most important thing to remember is to keep it wet. Longer dwell times are tolerable and may be helpful as long as the siding remains wet.

Ellis also warns to be very cautious when using bleach around metals, lamp fixtures, bushes, etc. and also to use particular care when cleaning older vinyl to avoid shiny spots.

Depending on the layout, he usually starts at the bottom and then cleans his way up to avoid streaking. Higher psi machines will need a larger orifice and a greater distance away from the surface in order to get the lower psi. He generally uses a 40-degree nozzle, but sometimes uses a soap tip instead. "If you use a variable wand, you can get the happy medium between the two—low pressure and enough water volume."

When conditions warrant it and you need the ability to apply a higher than normal concentration of

cleaner, it is good to have an X-jet type injector in your arsenal of cleaning tools.

#### **Myth vs. Reality**

Vincent Valles of Dur-a-Shield, which manufactures a product for restoring vinyl, clarifies a common misconception about vinyl siding: "A dull, faded appearance is not oxidation." He explains that the color is blended throughout the vinyl as part of the manufacturing process. Because the color is throughout the vinyl siding, it cannot be removed "layer by layer" as may happen when the sun oxidizes paint. The University of Southern Mississippi has documented evidence of such difference with tests performed by chemists.


According to Valles, the manufacturing process for vinyl siding involves the blending of the substrate with the capstock. Because the color is throughout, the grade of the vinyl siding is in direct

proportion to the amount of titanium oxide particles that is blended into the capstock. The higher the percentage of titanium particles, the higher the grade of the vinyl siding. The problem begins when the binder coat (top layer) is abraded by sunlight and/or acid rain, exposing the titanium oxide particles loosely attached to the vinyl surface—subsequently causing the dull, faded appearance.

Valles further describes, "There is an electrostatic bond between the titanium oxide and the vinyl itself; the only way to remove these loose particles is by some form of agitation, not necessarily scrubbing. Micrography shows that the weathered surface is rough and scatters the light irregularly, resulting in a dull appearance due to the degradation of the surface binder. This chalky residue that easily rubs off is simply loose titanium oxide particles that become dislodged with contact.

"Once removed, the cleaning process leaves a clean vinyl surface that is pitted where the particles have been removed. Once the surface has been cleaned and effectively restored, a new protective shield is formed on the vinyl surface, restoring the color and preventing further degradation of the vinyl siding. Without restoration and protection, the degradation process will continue. It will only be a matter of time until the surface will again look faded and oxidized. In addition, the pitted surface would provide an excellent point of attachment for dirt, microbial growth, and moisture—ensuring continued degradation in the future."

Next month, we will share some tips for specific stain removal and things to avoid, as well as some additional resources you can investigate.

*Additional sources: [www.napcobuildingproducts.com](http://www.napcobuildingproducts.com); Gary Heisch, Rollex Corporation; Mitten Vinyl; and Doc Reisman, president of the Power Washers of North America. *