Proper Painting Techniques Add Longevity

When house paint blisters, peels, cracks, flakes or mildews, the tendency is to blame the paint instead of the painter. More often than not, the painter is responsible—not for being a bad painter—but for being unaware of or ignoring the source of the problems.

Professional painters and paint company researchers know that moisture is the worst enemy of paint. It is this aggressor that the average homeowner needs to battle when doing his own painting.

The interior of the average home produces a large amount of moisture throughout the year. It is during the winter, however, that moisture plays the greatest havoc on exterior painted walls. Moisture accumulates on the inside of the walls, where it is eventually drawn through to the outside by the heat of the sun. When moisture goes to work on wood siding and the paint covering it, the result is trouble.

To combat the negative effects of moisture, first find the source. Depending upon your particular circumstances, it could be improper venting; water leaking from the roof, gutters or plumbing; or rain getting into siding through seams and gaps around doors and windows.

After locating the source of moisture, eliminate it by sealing up all cracks, openings and leaks. Then provide proper ventilation by installing roof or wall-mounted ventilator ducts and fans in moisture-producing areas. Vent tubes or under-lap vents can help relieve the moisture build-up in a wall. Using a vapor-proof paint on interior walls can also help.

With the moisture problem solved, it's time to take a look at the second enemy of paint—poor surface preparation.

Lack of proper priming, applying new paint over chipped, cracked or chalked paint, or a heavy build-up of old paint is a guarantee that problems will soon follow. Applying a second or third coat of paint before the previous coat completely dries can also lead to trouble.

Begin all painting jobs by properly priming wood and metal surfaces. If the old paint is damaged, use a scraper, paint remover or power sander to remove all loose paint. Then, either featheredge the remaining paint areas or use a filler or caulking to smooth the surface before priming. If you intend to give your house a second coat of paint, be sure to wait until the first coat has had plenty of time to dry. The improved appearance of your home and the money saved by a paint job that lasts are well worth the extra effort.

Choosing an Insulation Contractor

Most people are willing to do their own weatherstripping, caulking and other smaller insulation projects that help keep energy bills down. However, many do not have the inclination, time or physical ability to conquer major insulation projects involving attics, crawl spaces, basements and outside walls. A competent contractor can get the job done with a minimal amount of fuss.

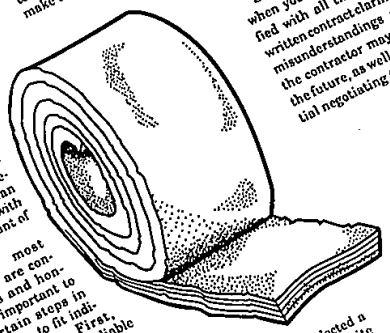
Although most contractors are conscientious and honest, it is important to take certain steps in choosing one to fit individual needs. First, locate a number of reliable contractors. Do not be afraid to contact the small businessman. Often he can give you equally good service at competitive prices. For a list of contractors, turn to the classified section of the newspaper under "Air Conditioning—Heating Contractors." Other sources include the local chapter of the National Association of Home Builders or Home Builders Association. Areas with local offices for government-funded or non-profit home improvement assistance centers will also have a file on reputable area contractors.

From these sources, choose three or four contractors. Narrow the list by investigating each one's business reputation. Upon request, most contractors will gladly furnish you with a list of past customers. Call a number of these customers and ask how satisfied they were with the completed job. See how long the contractor has been in business. As a rule of thumb, the longer the better.

Call the Better Business Bureau and give them your list of choices. They will tell you if and how many complaints have been made against each contractor.

Finally, get cost and time estimates from each contractor. With all these factors in hand, you can now make an informed decision.

Once you have selected a contractor, have him write up a specific contract for the job. To make sure the contract includes all the work you want done, make a list. Check off each job on your list as you read the contract. See that the warranty is also included in the written contract. Sign the contract only when you completely satisfied with all the details. A written contract clarifies any misunderstandings you and the contractor may have in the future, as well as the initial negotiating time.



Leaky Roof Syndrome

Roof leaks are one of the worst emergency home repairs. While repairs need to be done outside, leaks are generally only noticed during bad weather. One course of action is to use pots, pans, buckets, etc., to catch the water and then wait for the weather to improve. That, however, is not the best approach. You need to locate the source of the leak while it is still raining. If you wait until everything has dried up, you might look forever for the source of that drip.

If possible, look on the underside of the roof (from the attic, for example) for the spot where the water is going through the ceiling. This point of entry is rarely directly over the dripping, but mark the spot so you have a starting point later. Follow the drip (or wetness) to what appears to be its source. Look for water stains on rafters and, in the daylight, for pinpricks of light in the roof. Take a very careful look around anything that goes through the roof (chimney stack or vent pipe). Areas where two roof slopes meet, such as valleys, dormers and ridgers, deserve special attention. When you think you have found the source, mark it.

At this point, all you may be able to do is find the source. If the problem is so bad it needs immediate attention, staple, tack or nail a sheet of plastic or building paper over the damage. Weigh the risk of venturing onto a wet and possibly windy roof against the potential water damage very carefully.

Once the weather has improved, get on the roof and look for the source of the problem. The way to locate it on the outside is by driving a thin nail up through the roof from the spot you marked inside. The most likely places for leaks to develop occur where asphalt or wood shingles appear cracked or worn, or where slate and tile is broken or even missing. Take a careful look at all places where there is flashing (the metal seams around objects protruding through the roof), such as chimneys. Also examine areas where different roof slopes meet or where skylights exist.

Small leaks often found around flashed areas can be fixed with a liberal application of roofing tar or sometimes more neatly with caulk squeezed from a caulking gun.

Shingles which are torn, cracked or missing can often be made leak-proof by sliding a piece of flashing up underneath, nailing it in place and then covering the nail holes and edges of the flashing with roofing tar. Force the flashing up with a block of wood. You may need to do this on several adjacent courses.

Repairs which involve more than applications of roofing tar can become complicated and are probably best left to professionals. The same is true for repairs in which the shingles are excessively worn, cracked, lacking their gravel coating or, if wooden, covered in moss or split. Asphalt and wood shingles do not last forever. Their deterioration and replacement is eventually unavoidable. Although slate and tile are considerably more expensive, they will last much longer.

Stuck Wind

Nothing is more frustrating than a window that just won't budge! Of the most common window types, double-hung windows and casement windows, casement are more prone to stick. Since windows face the weather, to keep them painted free resulting paint actually shut. This insulation, but want to

Furnace Efficiency

You want your furnace or heating system to run efficiently so that you stay warm during the cold weather and save money at the same time. Performing preventative maintenance can help keep your heating system operating more efficiently, longer and safer. Here are some things you can do:

- Make sure your exhaust system or chimney is free of debris. Exhaust gases can be trapped by bird nests, leaves, other materials. This also the danger such obstructions

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