

Maintenance Painting  
For Common Interest Developments

By Mike Muilenburg

Mike Muilenburg Bio

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# **I. System Components & Maintenance Responsibilities**

## **Typical Components**

Individual unit exterior surfaces included in a maintenance painting system might consist of some or all of the following:

1. Exterior siding – Examples include stucco, wood, plywood, T-111, horizontal wood lap, hardboard, Masonite, shingle, and shake.
2. Wood trim – Examples include window and door trim, door jambs, plant-on trim, fascia, barge rafters, eaves, soffits, belly bands, corner trim, stringers, balconies, rail caps, handrails, doors, balusters, posts, beams, patio fences, and trellises.
3. Metal trim – Examples include flashing, gutters, downspouts, scuppers, roof valleys, vents, roof jacks, spark arrestors, stringers, conduit, doors, metal railings, and metal gates.
4. Masonry – Examples include stucco, tilt-up concrete walls, foundations, poured-in-place retaining walls, and block walls.

Common area site-work included in a maintenance painting system might consist of some or all of the following: carports, clubhouse, cabana, pool pump enclosure, metal pool railing and gate, trash enclosures, signs, light poles, mail kiosks, perimeter walls, vehicle entry gates, walkway bridges and railings, walkway arbors, and red curbs.

Surfaces typically excluded from a maintenance painting system might consist of some or all of the following: patio covers (wood trellises), owner-installed or modified items, roof jacks (on tile roofs or aging shake roofs), unit light fixtures, door interiors, anodized metal frames, deck tops, or screen doors.

*It is important to note the distinction between maintenance of the building components versus maintenance of the paint film itself. Technically, the painter is providing maintenance on the paint system, which in turn is protecting the building components. The paint system includes the paint film, caulking, and patching. To understand the distinction, consider that when a trim board must be repaired, it is not the painter who is typically called out to perform the work, but a carpenter. But when the paint film is damaged by graffiti, then the painter is called.*

Typical paint materials that are used to protect building components, listed by substrate, are as follows:

1. Masonry components: 100% acrylic exterior latex paint, vinyl-modified acrylic exterior latex paint, or elastomeric waterproof coating. The sheen is usually flat. Note that the application of a 100% acrylic product tends to result in a finish with a side sheen.
2. Wood trim components: 100% acrylic exterior latex paint, or vinyl-modified acrylic exterior latex paint. The sheen is usually flat or low sheen, but is occasionally semi-gloss.
3. Metal trim components: Same as #2 above, except metal railings. Metal railings and gates are typically painted with a rust-inhibitive industrial enamel, semi-gloss or gloss. An upgraded system would be to apply an epoxy prime coat, followed by a polyurethane topcoat.
4. Hardboard siding: 100% acrylic exterior latex paint, usually flat or low sheen. There have been numerous lawsuits associated with the use of this siding material. One of the results of the litigation is that only 100% acrylic exterior latex paint products should be used as a finish coat on this type of construction material.
5. Doors: Paint-grade doors are typically painted with an acrylic enamel or oil-based industrial enamel, semi-gloss or gloss. Enamels result in a hard finish capable of withstanding the rigors of an entry door opening and closing. Also, enamels generally exhibit excellent blocking resistance. Stain-grade doors are typically varnished with a clear satin, semi-gloss, or gloss marine-grade product.

6. Primers: Numerous primers exist for each substrate previously listed. Primers are used to help the finish coat adhere to the substrate or existing paint film, to block tannins in wood from discoloring the finish, and to provide a first coat when a color change is being employed.

## Responsibility

### *Establishing A Painting Program*

A homeowner association CC&R's should spell out what is the responsibility of the individual homeowner, and what is considered the common area to be maintained by the HOA. These codes and regulations change from association to association; consequently, it is important to examine these vital documents when implementing a painting program. Typical exclusions might be interior patio fences, entry doors, patio covers (wood trellises), or deck tops. In a "master" association, the individual unit structures might be omitted, with the association maintaining only site-work, such as pool buildings, signs, light poles, and common area railings. Note that not all of these documents are accurate, and must be reviewed occasionally. Consider the following scenario:

A homeowner association – let's call it XYZ HOA - set out to implement its painting program by contracting with a painting firm to have its patio wrought iron railings recoated. When notified that a vine growing on the interior of her patio railing would need to be removed prior to the painting, a knowledgeable owner referred to her CC&R's, noting that maintenance of the interior side of the patio fences was the responsibility of the homeowners, not the association. Apparently, the model units were built with solid wood fences, and the CC&R's were never updated to allow for the fact that the fences had been redesigned to include wrought iron, not wood. Considering the delicate issue with individual owner's plants, the dispute was not resolved until a year later, when the owner was allowed to keep her plants, in a "grandfather" concession. The CC&R's were ultimately amended at a considerable cost in effort and money, and the painting project was not completed until 18 months later!

A painting program differs from a painting project in that a single project has a defined start and finish date, while a painting program is ongoing, encompassing walk-through inspections, reserve study calculations, warranty work, maintenance work orders, as well as the individual paint projects within the program's defined paint cycles. In short, a painting program is all knowledge pertaining to the past and present condition of the paint film, and future expectations of ensuing paint applications. To accomplish a painting program an association may:

- ✓ Consult existing reserve study for useful life and history of paint film.
- ✓ Contract with a reserve analyst to complete a new study, if existing is incomplete or inaccurate.
- ✓ Hire a construction consultant to analyze existing paint film, to estimate useful life.
- ✓ Contract with a painting contractor to complete work orders for miscellaneous repairs, and to provide updated budget numbers for reserve study.
- ✓ Contract with an on-site maintenance person to complete work orders for miscellaneous repairs.
- ✓ Contact paint contractor who performed previous work for potential warranty issues.
- ✓ Keep a record of painting maintenance as a reference for future projects, including colors, surfaces painted, date last painted, name of contractor, and appropriate phone numbers.
- ✓ Have a professional community manager complete any, or all of the above items on the association's behalf.

### *Executing A Painting Project*

When it has been determined that the existing paint film has completed its useful life on a complex, a repainting project is commenced. It is the painting program that answers the *who, what, and when* of the actual project: who determines the scope of the project, who handles the bidding process, what surfaces and units must be included, and when the project is to be performed. As with a painting program, the association can contract with an outside service to handle each and every aspect of the job. To accomplish a painting project, an association may:

- ✓ Hire a construction consultant or architect to write specifications, accept bids, and manage the project.

- ✓ Contact a paint manufacturer's representative to write specifications and conduct pre-job walk-through with a select group of painting contractors.
- ✓ Contact various paint contractors for bids and/or specifications.
- ✓ Contract with a building contractor to perform needed wood repairs prior to painting.
- ✓ Contract with a color consultant to help the association upgrade its color scheme.
- ✓ Have a professional community manager complete any, or all of the above items on behalf of the association.

### **Delegation of Maintenance Painting Responsibilities**

The reality of the CID business is that many associations are reactionary in their handling of maintenance needs. The "squeaky wheel" approach to dealing with homeowner requests yields a counterproductive effort, especially if that homeowner happens to be on the board of directors. The proactive board, armed with the proper information, can avoid problems before they arise. The most effective boards are those that have the foresight to anticipate an outcome, explain it to the community, and offer a solution at the same time.

Once again, XYZ HOA is in trouble. The community recently completed the painting of all masonry retaining walls throughout the complex, including a wall adjacent to its tennis court. Within two months of painting, large pockets formed on the walls, and began to break open, revealing white crystalline salt deposits. At the tennis court, the effect of the balls hitting the wall exacerbated the breakage, leaving the court floor slick from the debris. Wishing to avoid an accident, the association shut down the court and contacted the painter to fix the wall, which he did, only to have the situation recur months later. As it turned out, there was an inadequate vapor barrier behind the retaining wall. The salt deposits were being formed in the presence of the water source, and lifting the new paint off the wall. The association elected to have the back of the wall excavated in order to install a bituthene membrane to stop the moisture transfer to the tennis court side of the wall, a very expensive procedure. If someone had foreseen the problem, a different coating system could have been used, avoiding the need for expensive excavation.

Ultimately, it is the board of directors' responsibility to manage a painting program. Boards differ in their approach, or management style. For instance, some boards are "staff driven"; making only policy decisions to be carried out by another, usually a community manager. Other boards are "hands on", actually performing some, or all the duties dictated by policy. Many boards are an unfortunate combination of the two, acting inconsistently in handling its affairs.

The informed association delegates maintenance responsibilities in a way such that the person or company performing each task is the one most suited to handle it. Most boards are not qualified to perform all duties associated with maintenance. There are numerous professionals who can assist the association in completing any maintenance painting-related endeavor. The following is a list of those entities, and duties generally associated with each:

#### Painting Contractor

- ~ Perform coating installation per specification.
- ~ Report dry rot. Inform manager of any site condition not suited to the performance of a first class job, including homeowner noncompliance.
- ~ Recommend procedural changes that will enhance specifications on existing project.
- ~ Recommend proactive measures that will enhance the overall painting program.
- ~ Keep essential information regarding the painting project on file as a future reference.
- ~ Be an asset to the property manager.
- ~ Cooperate with other vendors working on site.
- ~ Assist in walkthroughs and site inspections.

### Community Manager

- ~ Procure a professionally written maintenance painting program establishing when and what to paint.
- ~ Procure a professionally written painting specification, including a detailed color scheme.
- ~ Interview/hire painting service contractor to perform work.
- ~ Be a liaison between service contractors and board of directors.
- ~ Obtain color approval sign-off.
- ~ Enforce homeowner compliance.
- ~ Arrange pre-job bidders conference.
- ~ Arrange work-in-progress field inspections.
- ~ Arrange periodic maintenance inspections (see “Annual Calendar” and “Walk-Through Checklist” appendices).

The manager, on behalf of the board of directors, will enlist professionals in disciplines related to painting to run the program. Here are a number of likely sources available to the professional community manager:

### Related Disciplines

- ~ Paint Manufacturer – Some manufacturers have excellent “management services” programs that provide specifications, color consulting, and pre-job bidders conferences with the understanding that their paint will be used on the job.
- ~ Construction Manager/Consultant/Architect – These professionals are generally capable of handling all aspects of a painting program, and are licensed accordingly. Due to cost considerations, these professionals are used primarily for overseeing complicated projects that involve two or more trades, such as when major repairs follow a construction defect settlement. They are also the primary source for identification of defects in need of repairs prior to the start of a painting project.
- ~ Construction Contractor – A general contractor with a B license that performs actual repair work on dry rot, or any damaged building component.
- ~ Color Consultant – A good consultant not only creates an appropriate color palette that maximizes the real estate value of an association, but is able to sell the new scheme in terms that are objective, cutting through emotional issues commonly encountered when new colors are being reviewed.

Even a staff-driven board of directors must be involved to some degree beyond the basic aspects of creating association policy.

### Board of Directors

- ~ Color approval
- ~ Contract approval
- ~ Maintain operations manual, including color files, paint products used, dates, surfaces painted, contractor names and phone numbers. This essential information is oftentimes lost when an association changes management companies. If this information is not kept, and the reserve study is not detailed enough to discern a viable painting program, the consequences can be quite costly in terms of either redundant painting, or inadequate maintenance leading to repairs otherwise avoidable.

~ Delegate authority to a community manager to run the painting program.

### Homeowners

~ Report paint failures or wood damage to the community manager.

~ Remove pets, or any personal belongings that might interfere with the completion of a maintenance contract on specific date(s).

~ Refrain from placing or installing personal items in such a manner as to endanger any building component. For example, a homeowner should not put potted plants on top of a wood rail cap, or carpeting on top of an exterior wood deck.

## **II. WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT FROM AN EXTERIOR COATINGS SYSTEM**

### **Paint Products**

An exterior architectural paint coating is a thin, flexible membrane designed to provide protection and beauty to the building exterior. In fact, we paint to fulfill only two purposes: to enhance the aesthetics of, and to prevent or slow down the deterioration of our structures.

#### Aesthetics

Paint is an opaque product, tinted to virtually any color imaginable. Certain pigments and colors, however, are not as colorfast as others are, fading or discoloring prematurely. Modern color schemes used in a common interest development generally do not employ the bright exterior colors prone to fading, and are not normally a concern.

The sheen of a paint film is significant, not just in terms of how the finish looks, but in the coating's ability to resist scuffing and dirt accumulation. Gloss finishes, inappropriate for most exterior walls, are suitable on doors, trim, and handrails because the harder finish will not mar as easily as a flat finish. The softness of a flat finish lends itself well in most exterior applications in that it does not tend to exacerbate deficiencies or roughness in the texture of the substrate.

The typical paint film is approximately as thick as a sheet of paper, 1.5 – 2.5 mils. Considering the relatively thin membrane, there is little texture added to a surface with a new coat of paint. In some instances, especially when back-rolling, a slight stipple effect results from the roller nap. Sometimes this is a desired finish. For example, when spray painting an acrylic paint onto a flat surface, such as hardboard siding, spray lines and patterns can develop, as the sheen increases in areas where the product has overlapped or has been put on thicker. A slight roller stipple can be a preferred finish, in this case.

For the purposes of painting an HOA, stucco and plywood siding are usually painted flat; hardboard siding, wood trim, and metal trim are usually painted flat or low sheen; and entry doors and metal railings are usually painted gloss (or semi-gloss). Of course – as with any rule – there are exceptions.

One final note regarding aesthetics: It should be pointed out that the most difficult aspect of completing a painting project – from the point of view of a board of directors – is agreeing on a color scheme, especially if the old one is outdated. Too often the painting contractor is put in the unenviable position of having to cater to the tastes of vocal board members who have but one agenda – their own. The problem with colors is that there is no compromise. It is not possible to take a color from each of two schemes and add them together in order to appease proponents of both. If a painting project is pending that involves a color change, the process should be started a year early to allow for the process to unfold, and to consider the hiring of an outside color consultant.

XYZ HOA had a difficult time selecting an updated color format. Convinced that the project needed to be completed prior to the next rainy season, the board decided to proceed with the selection of its contractor prior to finalizing colors, which was holding up the process. As the drop-dead date for commencing the project neared, the board made the decision to form a committee to select colors, since the next board meeting would be too late. Unfortunately, not only did the hastily convened group make poor color choices, but the need for a second coat of paint ensued, prompting the contractor to increase his price beyond what many believed to be reasonably competitive.

### Protection

An exterior coating system protects the substrate in a variety of ways, but its primary function is to prevent water absorption, and to shield the sun's UV light. Note that a conventional acrylic paint system is not waterproof, but water repellent. Consequently, paint on horizontal surfaces performs poorly compared to vertical elevations. Wall caps and railings should be slightly beveled to allow water to run off. A wood cap that is cupped will have a short life in terms of both the paint and the wood itself. The community manager should be aware of the following exterior coating systems commonly found on an association:

~ Acrylic Coatings – The best performing system for the majority of an association's needs will be a water-based, acrylic latex paint. Keep in mind that there are a variety of paint manufacturers each with a variety of products. A specification that simply denotes a manufacturer's name does little to inform the contractor of the quality of the paint to be used because each manufacturer makes different grades of paint, some intended for the lower end of the market.

A cheaper grade might have clay extenders or a high percentage of vinyl in the resin when compared to the top grade acrylic paints. These paints will not be as elastic, and will break down more quickly than the high-end acrylic grade. The elasticity of paint is crucial in terms of protection, especially on wood that is prone to splitting, or checking. Cracking of the paint film or substrate will lead to water absorption, followed by surface failure in the form of delaminated plywood, warped trim boards, or dry rot.

~ Elastomeric Coatings – Once thought of as a panacea in our industry, elastomeric is a waterproofing system, not a paint system. In its early years, this coating was used to bridge cracks in garage doors, plywood siding, and cracked trim boards. While the coating looked good, it actually caused severe damage to a number of associations by trapping moisture behind the membrane, leading to dry rot of the building infrastructure. Manufacturers ten-year warranties in the late '80's have mostly disappeared.

Today, elastomeric products are used in extreme cases on stucco walls, and also as a deck coating. When using this system, the contractor must seal all penetrations to prevent water from getting in behind the waterproofing. For example, downspouts should be removed, and plumbing outlets should be caulked. This system should not be used in place of proper construction practices.

~ Oil-based Coatings – The "Clean Air Act" in the mid '70's proved to be the beginning of the end for many products, such as exterior solvent-based stains and enamels. Strict air pollution control requirements mandated a lower VOC content of paint, in an attempt to reduce ground-level ozone, or smog. Early attempts at compliance yielded products that were "tropey" and slow drying. Imagine asking a homeowner to leave his entry door open for twelve hours to allow enough time for the new paint to dry!

Subsequent modern renditions are better, but most agree that nothing compares to the oil-based paints of old. Now, oil-based products are relegated to a minor role in homeowner exterior repaints, used on entry doors (if previously painted with an oil-based product), and ferrous metal surfaces such as wrought iron railings. The coating still results in a harder enamel finish than an acrylic version, making it suitable on doors, and is rust-inhibitive, making it suitable on wrought iron.

~ Epoxy/Polyurethane Systems – This coating system is gaining popularity as a solution to rust and corrosion on metal railings. Wrought iron railings, especially, take abuse from irrigation



systems, gardener tools, and condensation, causing premature rusting. The quality of the metal used in railings has come under suspicion in recent years, although manufacturers claim that irrigation “gray water” has something to do with it. Or maybe the penchant for painting these railings white is causing the issue to become more obvious, but either way, wrought iron railings seem to be requiring more frequent attention in the past few years.

The epoxy portion of this system is used because it holds back rust very effectively, and has incredible adhesive characteristics. Epoxies are used on structures like mid-ocean oil rigs for their durability. The shortcoming of epoxies is that they chalk, not good for a railing or gate frequented by pedestrians. That’s where the polyurethane topcoat comes into play. The polyurethane has excellent gloss retention, resists corrosion, and results in a hard finish – very suitable for wrought iron railings and gates.

The drawback to this system is its expense. Not only does the system require two full coats, but also the coatings themselves can cost as much as \$100.00 per gallon. However, factored over the life of the coating, the system will be cheaper in the long run, at least in extreme cases where rust is difficult to control.

### **Life Expectation, By Substrate**

Many variables affect the paint film’s life expectancy. Sun exposure, weather, adjacent landscaping, pedestrian traffic, dark paint colors, house pets, and misdirected sprinkler heads can all take their toll on the paint film. But nothing affects the life of paint more than the condition of the substrate itself. In other words, if the substrate is in poor condition, the paint film itself will be negatively affected. For instance, neglected wood siding tends to check, or crack, to such a degree that the new paint film is incapable of bridging the gaps in the wood, allowing water to penetrate the plywood veneer. In turn this can cause the edge of the paint film to lift, curl, and eventually peel prematurely.

All things being equal, however, there are “rules of thumb” that act as a guideline for how long a paint film should last. Life expectancies are usually offered in terms of the substrate being protected. The predominant surfaces – wood, stucco, and metal – differ in terms of elasticity, porosity, heat conduction, and water absorption.

~ Wood Components – Suggested painting interval is five-to-six years, or twice as often as stucco.

~ Stucco/Masonry Components – Suggested painting interval is ten-to-twelve years.

~ Metal Components – Suggested painting interval is five-to-six years on non-ferrous metal, such as flashing, vents, gutters, and downspouts. Suggested painting is three-to-four years on ferrous metal surfaces such as wrought iron railings and gates.

~ Entry Doors – Suggested painting interval on paint-grade doors is five-to-six years. Suggested interval on stain-grade door depends on exposure. Varnished doors facing the Sun should be re-coated annually - similar to how a boat owner maintains her wood decks – then stripping all coatings off and starting over about every ten years. Some varnished doors, with no exposure to weathering elements, will not need re-coating for years, or at least not until after the effects of pedestrian traffic become evident.

### **Common Failures, Causes & Solutions**

Too often, a failure of the substrate is mistaken for a failure of the paint film, and vice-versa. Although the two can be intertwined, there is not always a causal relationship. Many disputes arise in the painting industry over substrate failures that have nothing to do with the installation of the paint, and the educated manager will be able to discern the difference.

For example, premature rusting of the lower rail of a pool fence might be caused by improper irrigation, or by dirt-to-metal contact, not a direct failure of the paint film. Not to absolve the painter of all guilt: the contractor should work with the manager to help avoid certain situations that will inevitably result in a failure.

Here are a few of the most common paint film failures, along with a trouble-shooter's guide to resolve the problems:

~ *Loss of adhesion* – Peeling paint has many root causes, and is best understood when categorized by substrate. While dirt, mildew, and lack of primer might be a common reason paint peels on any given surface, moisture content is a more of a problem for wood than stucco, and is not even a factor for metal. The moisture content of wood should not exceed 12%; whereas, stucco should not exceed 17%.

When painting metal, humidity and dewpoint are of great concern due to condensation. If you see total paint failure on a wrought iron fence, it usually means that the painter either painted the metal in cold or damp conditions, such as late in the day just before a foggy night. Also, non-ferrous metal that is not bonderized must be acid-etched prior to priming, or peeling might occur.

Another situation where peeling can cause a major headache is when a latex-enamel is painted directly over an oil-based enamel door. Stripping a homeowner's door is a losing proposition, and must be avoided, except when removing layers of failed varnish damaged by UV rays.

Hardboard siding is a unique case, and has been the source of at least one major class-action lawsuit against a manufacturer. The paraffin-based bonding agent in the wood particles is at times incompatible with the prime coat, causing massive paint film failure down to the substrate. The association painter is not liable, in the sense that the failure was not between his coat and the previous coat, but between the substrate and the prime coat, an inherited situation.

The solution in all these cases is to remove the loose paint, sand all edges smooth, spot-prime and paint.

~ *Tannic Acid Bleeding* – Tannins in redwood and cedar will bleed through water-based paint if not properly primed. The brown tannic acid stains are unsightly on anything but a dark brown finish. The most common surface where this is an issue is wood fencing. The problem here is that fence builders are seldom required to back-prime the wood, so any overlap is left unprimed when the painter gets around to putting on his coatings. Consequently, when rain or irrigation water hits the fence, tannins will bleed from where the wood overlaps if water is able to seep in between the boards, even if the painter primed all the exposed areas prior to painting.

The solution here is not so simple, since priming and repainting will not always solve the situation. Eventually, as the wood ages the tannins become less of an issue, but that could be years. One solution is to paint the fence in a darker color, not always practical.

~ *Nail Heads* – A number of situations arise from poor quality nails, or improper nailing techniques. Nails not galvanized or dipped might rust prematurely when scored by a hammer. Insufficient use of nails by a carpenter might result in bowing or warping. Overdriven nails might allow water to penetrate and cause damage, such as swelling on hardboard siding.

It is not always easy to determine the source of rust on a nail head. If the rust is coming from on top, it can be simply primed; but if it is coming from behind the head, it might need to be reset and caulked. Overdriven nail heads should be caulked, especially on hardboard siding.

The use of white as a common trim color has made this a major issue. If a complex is scheduled for painting, make sure the specifications address this concern.

~ *Fading* – Lumped in with discoloration, this can be a warranty item involving the manufacturer. Other causes might be excessive thinning of the product prior to painting, over-tinting or use of the wrong tint-base, or using an interior-grade paint in an exterior application. The solution is to prime and repaint, following manufacturer recommendations.

~ *Burnishing* – Burnishing is what occurs if new paint, when lightly rubbed, develops a sheen or scratch mark. The cause might be too much pigmentation or too soft of a finish, especially when using dark colors. The solution is probably to use a different type of paint, but the manufacturer should be consulted, and a test product should be tried out before full implementation.

~ *Separation* – When re-coating a surface that has a residue of oil or wax, the paint can bead up, or separate. A common example is when homeowners clean their entry doors with Pledge or Liquid Gold, leaving a waxy residue. To prevent this from happening, the door must be cleaned with an industrial cleaner, such as TSP. The problem for the painter is judging how often the door has been treated with the incompatible cleaner. The intensity of the cleaning process must be proportionate to the wax buildup, and is not always easy to gauge.

### **The Proactive Approach**

When problems arise, human nature suggests that someone will be blamed. In the world of professional sports, the finger's direction is usually at the coach of the team; in the CID world, the board of directors bears the brunt of the blame, whether or not deserving. How a board deals with conflict with the community members is the stuff of a full-scale publication that will only be touched on here as the subject relates to the painting trade.

A proactive management style does not mean that problems will never occur. While the proactive board attempts to avert conflict with preemptive measures – usually through education in related disciplines – it is important to realize that the directors are neither qualified to act as professional painters, roofers, or carpenters, nor are licensed to do so. The board must not think that it alone can prevent all conflicts that can arise during the performance of a maintenance contract.

The proactive style involves teamwork. The team members might be a combination of the various consultants, paint manufacturers, painting contractors, community managers, and the association committee members.

## **III. APPLICATION METHODS**

### **Spray Vs Back-Roll**

Back-rolling is an application method that involves first spraying, then manually rolling paint onto the surface, forcing the material into the many small cracks in the surface. Especially for use on wood, the purpose of back-rolling is to fill checked areas in a plywood veneer, for example, protecting it from water penetration, which can lead to delamination and warping of the siding.

Simply spray-painting will not provide the same protection, since spraying can leave “shadows” on a surface that is textured. In fact, if checked wood is not back-rolled, the cracking will be unabated, ultimately causing premature wood failure. In the absence of back-rolling the cracks continue to develop, and water enters the wood with increasingly less resistance.

Keep in mind that the most effective coating is one that provides a continuous, unbroken barrier against water penetration and other weathering sources. Back-rolling accomplishes this goal by filling and/or bridging voids otherwise left unprotected. The idea is to fill the small fissures before they open up too wide. Even back-rolling will be ineffective filling these cracks after a few millimeters in width.

The importance of back-rolling diminishes when considering other surfaces such as stucco and hardboard siding. Professional specification writers usually include back-rolling on stucco surfaces, but a smaller percentage list hardboard siding as an item to be back-rolled.

Stucco is textured, a difficult surface to get full coverage in a spray-only application. The positive aspect of stucco is that it is forgiving, in terms of wear-and-tear, and full coverage is desirable but less crucial than it is for wood.

Hardboard siding is relatively smooth, and applying a solid unbroken paint film is easier than on wood or stucco. One of the benefits of back-rolling hardboard siding is in reducing the occurrence of “flashing”, the sheen changes that can affect the finish coat if there is a buildup of the acrylic resin.

Another benefit in back-rolling on any surface is that it results in a consistent paint film thickness. It is virtually impossible to apply the material too thin, since “dry-rolling” behind the spray applicator is a slow, arduous process. On the job, constant dialogue takes place between the spray-painter and the one behind him with the roller, making certain the former does not get too far out ahead with the spray, and that the paint is of sufficient quantity to maximize ease of application.

From an applicator’s point of view, back-rolling is more labor-intensive, and tends to cost more in material than a spray-only application. Assume that your painter will not include this procedure if you do not have a formal specification specifically mentioning back-rolling, or if it is not spelled out in the contractor’s bid.

### **One-Coat Vs Two-Coat**

In a typical maintenance painting project over a good substrate, using the same color, one coat is generally considered sufficient. However, many who write specifications for a living consistently request two full finish coats. The thinking here is that two coats is better than one, in terms of increased protection of the substrate as well as the old paint film.

From the point of view of many applicators, one coat is usually all that is needed unless a drastic color change is in the works. The painter typically believes he can apply in one coat the equivalent of two coats, even when two coats are specified.

Bid documents must be very clear when describing the two-coat process. Back-rolling is a two-step process, but not a two-coat process. A tack-coat followed five minutes later by a full finish coat should not be considered two coats, either. If two coats are essential to the project, consider tinting the first coat a slight shade different than the finish, or having an inspection between coats.

From the point of view of the manufacturer, two coats is desirable, since product tests have shown that two coats at 1.5 – 2.5 mils will cure and perform better than one thick coat at 3.0 – 5.0 mils.

So who is right? Since it is improbable that an applicator has a testing lab in his warehouse, the manufacturer should be consulted regarding the performance of its coating. Some contractors will counter that the manufacturer just wants to sell more paint when it calls for a two-coat application. Either way, there is no reasonable argument suggesting that one thick coat is equivalent in performance to two applied in accordance with manufacturer specifications.

The answer to the question of whether to apply one coat or two coats in a pending paint project lies in the condition of the substrate, and the condition of the existing paint film. If two coats back-rolled will solve a checking problem on wood siding, then that is what should be specified. If two coats is deemed most appropriate on hardboard siding that is undergoing its first repaint project after a questionable first coat applied by the builder, then that should be specified. But if a painting project is being performed for aesthetic reasons over a coating and substrate in good condition, then one coat is perfectly acceptable.

The important point to note is that, in the absence of outside specifications, two coats probably will not be applied by your painter if he can help it, whether or not two coats is justified. Having a quality professional consultant write specifications designed to meet the specific needs of a complex has an undeniable merit, and will usually best serve the association.

### **Application Shortcuts**

The previous topic segues appropriately into this segment on painting shortcuts, but is not in the same category. The one-coat Vs two-coat debate demonstrates differing philosophies. Shortcuts, as described here, are things that a contractor does to make his job easier, and represents a potential savings to the homeowner association. If an association pays for two coats and only receives one, that is not a shortcut, but an unethical business practice, as would be watering down paint, or substituting an inferior grade paint for the specified one. Handling unethical contractors is a separate topic not presented here.

~ *Wrapping Trim* – Wood trim is usually painted in an accent color to highlight windows, doors, or trim. In an effort to save time, a painter can spray-paint the edge of the trim adjacent to the body, and only “face off” the trim using the accent color. By not wrapping the outside edge, the painter saves substantial time, a savings that can be passed on to the association if noted in the specifications prior to bidding. Note, however, that wrapping the trim results in a custom look, and is generally preferred over not wrapping. If a painter does not wrap the trim on a job where it was previously wrapped, he must be instructed to do so, or negotiate a settlement with the association.

~ *Eaves* – Eaves are either painted in the body color or the accent color, a determination usually made by the builder depending on whether he uses color-coated stucco as his finish, or not. If he uses this pigmented stucco, he will usually have the eaves sprayed out in the accent color before the stucco is installed. The issue becomes important when the association wishes to repaint. It is far cheaper to paint the eaves in the body color when spraying the stucco than to have to go around the building an extra time to paint the eaves.

Many color consultants hesitate using an accent color on eaves, not wishing to highlight this relatively unattractive feature. Substantial savings result from painting eaves the body color, a fact often lost on the average board of directors, but not the painting contractor. If your painter insists on changing the eave color to match the body, negotiate the cost savings on behalf of the association.

~ *Two-Coat Trim* – On a two-coat job, a favorite ploy among painters is to apply the trim’s first coat by spray concurrently with the body, in the main color instead of the accent. This procedure saves having to hand-trim the accent twice, resulting in huge cost savings. This only works when the accent color covers the body color in one coat.

The above shortcuts can be seen as cost savings to the association if handled properly. For example, if during a pre-bid walk-through a contractor broaches the subject of changing the eave color to the body color, all bidders can be instructed whether to factor the lower costs into their bids. Otherwise, the winning bidder might try to renegotiate the contract after the fact, compromising the association’s position.

### **Safety & Environmental Hazards**

- *Abiding by SB 198* – Senate Bill 198 mandates that all businesses must have in place an Injury & Illness Prevention Program, incorporating employee safety programs and safety training sessions, along with proper documentation. Many painting specifications now reference SB 198, and most companies abide by the law. The problem, of course, is that there are still enough contractors who circumvent compliance, putting themselves and their clients at risk. It is recommended that the community manager ask for copies of the “tailgate” safety meetings that the contractor should be having when painting for an association.
- *Proper Disposal of Paint Waste* – A lot has changed since the days when painters cleaned their brushes in the street, letting the dirty water empty directly into the storm drain. Nowadays, all paint waste must be contained, in some manner, depending on the type.

Latex clean-up water must no longer enter the storm sewer, or even be poured directly into the ground. All water used to clean tools used to apply latex paint must enter the sanitary sewer system, which goes to a treatment plant. An association complex will have a number of clean-out access covers that your painter should use. It is important that the painters do not use the area marked “Storm Sewer”, but the one denoted as “Sanitary Sewer”.

Solvent-based disposal restrictions are even tighter. Oil-based paint must be kept in a closed container when not in use, except when it is being transferred to another container. If you allow the painter to dispose of trash in the association dumpsters, make sure that the cans are completely empty. Air drying used containers of oil-based paint is illegal.

Used paint thinner must be transferred off association property by your painter and disposed of through a licensed waste handler. Your painter must follow strict procedures in dealing with paint thinner, based on how much waste the company generates per year. Never let your painter store used

thinner on association property, such as in a pool pump room or cabana closet. Waste thinner must be labeled as a hazardous material, and your association is neither designated as a treatment facility, nor has an EPA number.

Fortunately, such a small percentage of the paint used on exterior painting projects is solvent-based, that it is unlikely that this will ever be an issue. As long as there is no long-term storage by your painter, you should not be in danger.