

Roof Cleaning for Community Association Managers and Board Members – *John Browne, Roof-A-Cide*

Experienced Community Association Managers, familiar with the effects of repeated Roof Cleaning, know that using high pressure or harsh chemicals can greatly accelerate the aging of a roof and many just accept it as “the cost” of keeping roofs clean – but there are effective ways to avoid this.



BACKGROUND

Proper maintenance is obviously important to a community’s image, protection of property values, and Homeowner enjoyment of the community. It is also essential for controlling both short and long-term costs. Community Association Managers and Board Members taking on the responsibility of evaluating and planning the long-term direction and finances of a community should always be aware of what the long-term effects of maintenance, or lack of it, will be on the long-term direction and costs to the community.

Roofs are a prime example. If properly installed and maintained, a quality roof should last 25-30 years – and in some cases, up to 50 years. Unfortunately, many roofs here in Florida are in need of major repair or replacement after ONLY 15 years – or roughly 50% of their expected useful life!

Why? This usually happens when there is no plan of regularly scheduled inspection and maintenance to find and fix small problems before they become much bigger problems. Another reason is repeated cleaning using high pressure and/or harsh chemicals. While effective if done correctly, repeated use of these methods will damage the roof surface and, more importantly, the underlying weatherproofing.

While the reasons for cleaning are important: aesthetics, property values, energy efficiency, and increased longevity of the roof – not much is gained if the roofs are being damaged during the cleaning process. But whatever the reason is for cleaning, if you’re going to have it done, it is in your best interest to know what choices are available and how these will affect the roofs in order to make the best choice as to how to approach it properly.

THE PROBLEM

The black streaking found on most roofs is a type of algae. During the last 20 years, this algae has become hardier and has migrated to less humid environments than it has in the past. And in areas like Florida where it traditionally has been found, the staining is showing up earlier, is more severe

and settles on a greater number of roofs. This is a “growing” problem throughout the United States.

HOW CAN IT BE CLEANED?

Typical roof cleaning methods in Florida involve Pressure Cleaning or Chemical Cleaning with either Chlorine Bleach or newer, more environmentally friendly cleaners. **Each method has its advantages and disadvantages.**

Chlorine Bleach: A **light** chlorine bleach and water solution can be used followed by a thorough rinse. Of course, since chlorine bleach can be toxic, proper care should be taken to protect the surrounding property from overspray and runoff. The advantages in using chlorine include a fast cleaning process and minimal rinsing as compared to other methods. This translates into much less wear & tear on the roof - particularly asphalt shingle roofs. The disadvantages include the fact that Chlorine Bleach is extremely corrosive and will damage the metal fasteners, flashings, and fixtures on the roof as well as the underlying waterproofing membrane – ***especially in the very high concentrations commonly used by many companies here in Florida.*** This damage can go unnoticed for years before the problem becomes evident. ***Note: Never Allow High-Strength Chlorine Bleach solutions to be used on any roof.***



Enviro-Friendly Cleaners: These cleaners are usually oxygenated-bleach based products or mild detergents that are much safer for the roof and landscaping, but they generally require much more rinsing than the Chlorine Bleach method so they are more labor-intense and mean more foot traffic on the roof. A quality enviro-friendly product can be used on any roof and should not require any more than 100 psi to effectively rinse a shingle roof and even then, some granule loss should be expected.

Pressure Cleaning: Pressure cleaning is an option that should only be used on a concrete, clay, or standing seam metal roofs. Pressure cleaning eliminates most of the landscaping and chemical concerns, but it is very time consuming and it exerts tremendous force on a surface that is not really designed to handle it. In addition, repeated pressure cleaning can wear away the surface of some tiles that are only covered by a thin layer of coloring. When this happens, the grey concrete color starts to show through and the roof must be stained or painted. ***Note: Never Allow High Pressure to be used on Asphalt Shingles or Stone Coated Steel Roofs as this can easily cause irreparable damage.***

THESE METHODS ARE NOT A LONG-TERM SOLUTION

While these methods are relatively safe and effective when done properly, repeated cleaning with these methods will lead to premature aging of the roof. The natural erosion that occurs over time from the basic forces of heat, cold, wind, and rain alone are enough to bring most roofs to the point where annual inspections and minor repairs are a necessity to prevent unexpected and significant repair costs. **But when the roof is repeatedly subjected to high pressures or harsh chemicals, the aging of the roof is greatly accelerated.**



With repeated cleaning, concrete tiles are more likely to shift, slip, or break and asphalt shingles are more likely to become brittle and crack. When this happens, there is a greater chance of damaging the roof simply by walking on it. And once gaps are created, by natural means or otherwise, and subsequent pressure cleaning or chemical cleaning is performed on a roof, these gaps provide water or the corrosive solutions with a path to the protective roof underlayment, moisture barriers, metal valley underlining, and flashings

causing damage that can go unnoticed for years - increasing the chance of roof leaks and costly repairs.

WHAT IS THE BEST ALTERNATIVE - PREVENTION?

The safest and most cost-effective long-term strategies will minimize the use of high pressures and harsh chemicals by stressing Preventative Maintenance from the start. These strategies should include periodic roof inspections / maintenance, keeping the roof free of debris, and preventing algae discoloration before it begins. A proper program of preventative maintenance and algaecide protection will eliminate the need for future cleaning and the potential for damage that comes along with it – giving the homeowner and/or community an aesthetically pleasing roof for the full life of the roof.

Various companies now manufacture products that can inhibit the growth of roof algae for months and sometimes years with each application. The most appropriate algae prevention products are those that have proven results, are guaranteed, specifically designed for roofs, and have EPA approval for use on roofs.

John Browne is a Partner in [Roof-A-Cide](http://www.Roof-A-Cide.com) which has [Authorized Applicators](http://professionalroofcleaning.blogspot.com/), companies that are Licensed, Trained, and Equipped for Professional Roof Cleaning in 16 States throughout the US.
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