

Technical Tip

Resin Bleed

As hot weather approaches we begin getting calls about resin bleeding out of logs and what can be done to stop it. Some people call it sap or pitch or resin but it's all the same and short of replacing the log or logs that are bleeding there is nothing anyone can do to stop it from occurring. Resin is made of up of a combination of hydrocarbon compounds and is produced by most trees but particularly softwood species like spruce, pine and fir. Amber is fossilized tree resin. There is no way to outwardly determine if a log will bleed resin or not. Trees may form pockets of resin due to a past injury or for a variety of other reasons and when that tree is harvested it may take months or even years for the resulting log to begin to bleed resin.

Tree resin is typically thick and viscous but during the summer months on the sunny sides of log homes the logs can get hot enough for the resin contained in pockets and knots to become quite fluid and begin to bleed out of the wood. Once this begins it is virtually impossible to halt the flow of the resin out of the wood. It will easily burst through coatings like paint or stain and form an ugly sticky mass on top of the finish. One problem with resin bleed is that the log may continue to bleed each summer for many, many years. Most of the time it's just a few logs on a wall that bleed resin but occasionally we see a home where just about every log on a south or west facing wall bleeds resin and when that happens it can be very unsightly.

So is there anything that can be done about resin, pitch or sap bleed? Since the resin is soft and sticky it is impossible to wipe off the surface without making an even bigger mess. It's not water soluble so it can't be washed off and even solvents don't have much effect on it other than to spread it around. Small spots of resin can sometimes be cleaned off with alcohol but if there is a finish present the alcohol can also destroy the finish. The only effective method of removing resin that we are aware of is to chip it off but in order to do this the resin must be cold enough to become brittle. In the north it's best to wait for a cold winter day but in the south where cold days are far and few between you can use an ice pack to cool down the resin then try to chip it off. Sometimes this works and sometimes it doesn't but it may be worth a try. The problem is that come summer the bleeding will most likely start up again.

One of the biggest challenges relating to resin bleed is when it occurs on bare wood prior to the application of a finish. Since there is no effective way to totally remove the resin the finish ends up being applied on top of it. When the wall heats up and the resin starts flowing it carries the finish along with it leaving unsightly spots of exposed bare wood. Again there is not much that can be done to end this process until the resin eventually stops bleeding out of the wood.

Examples of Resin Bleed

