

## Technical Tip

# Spot Cleaning and Stripping

“Never attempt to strip or clean a section of a wall without applying whatever you are using to the entire wall.” For years this phrase was the key for obtaining a uniform surface in preparation for applying a transparent stain. In many cases this phrase is still valid but with the introduction of some of the newer technology products and better methods of application occasional spot cleaning and stripping can be accomplished without creating a problem.

### Strippers

Years ago the most commonly used finish removers contained sodium or potassium hydroxide. They were fairly effective for removing most types of paints and stains but due to their extremely high pH they darkened the wood. If only a section of a wall was exposed to these products it was almost impossible to obtain a consistent final color over the entire wall. That's where the use of Oxcon oxalic acid came into play and why Oxcon became known as a Blending Agent. Oxcon's low pH helped brighten the wood back up but if it was only applied to sections of a wall the resulting color would end up significantly different than the remainder of the wall. The solution to this problem was to apply Oxcon to the entire wall to even out the color of the bare wood and avoid a blotchy appearing finish.

Today's finish removers are mostly based on organic solvents and one of their most advantageous features is that they don't change the color of the wood. When removing an old, tired oil finish it is not unusual for pressure washing with just water and a mild cleaner like Log Wash or Wood ReNew to remove any residual pigments on those surfaces that are directly exposed to the sun and weather. But underneath roof overhangs and shaded areas the stain may still be in pretty good shape. There is nothing wrong with using S-100, Smart Strip or other organic solvents only on those spots where the finish is still adhering. Since they don't change the color of the wood you may not be able to see where these products were used.

### Cleaners

Wood cleaners are a somewhat different story since they are designed to both clean and brighten the surface. It is rare that anyone would want to clean a section of a wall without cleaning the entire wall. Once a wall has been cleaned with Log Wash or Wood ReNew there is nothing wrong with going back and spot cleaning areas that are still showing signs of dirt or discolorations with the same product. Log Wash and Wood ReNew are not interchangeable! Never attempt to clean part of a wall with Wood ReNew and the rest of the wall with Log Wash. Since Wood ReNew is slightly alkaline and Log Wash is acidic there is a very good chance that the resulting color of the wood will differ. If Wood ReNew has been used to remove grayed wood on an area of a wall there is nothing wrong with using Log Wash afterward but it must be applied to the entire wall to ensure a uniform color.

Chlorine bleach solutions should never be used for spot cleaning. The more the surface is exposed to bleach the more damage is done to the wood fibers and the greater the chance that discolorations or adhesion issues will arise sometime in the future.

### **Oxcon Oxalic Acid**

Now that most of the log home industry has followed our lead and stopped recommending chlorine bleach solutions for preparing logs and siding for a finish, the next most problematic surface preparation product that we encounter is oxalic acid. The use of Oxcon oxalic acid should be limited to eliminating specific type of discolorations such as metallic tannate stains. Although the label clearly states "Do not spot-treat since this method of application can cause blotching", there are some steps that can be taken that will allow localized discolorations to be spot treated while avoiding the risk of creating blotches on a wall.

The first step is to make sure the wall has been well cleaned using Wood Renew or Log Wash. Log Wash is preferable since the use of Wood ReNew will occasionally darken the wood a bit. If that occurs a two cups per gallon Log Wash solution will typically brighten the wood back up. Once the surface is clean, bright and dry, a solution of Oxcon may be applied to those areas that show signs of metallic tannate or water stains. Make sure the Oxcon is diluted to the recommended one part Oxcon to four parts water ratio and don't leave it on the wood for more than 10 to 15 minutes. And whatever you do don't allow it to dry on the wood. Now comes the most important step in the process, rinse, rinse and rinse again. You want to be sure that ALL of the Oxcon is rinsed off of the wood. The best way to verify adequate rinsing is by using pH Strips. Oxcon oxalic acid is fairly strong acid. If the pH of the rinse water on the wall remains below 6.0 it is a good indication that some oxalic acid is still present on the wood.

Once the surface is dry if the spot treated areas are the same color as the surrounding wood you are ready to apply the first coat of finish. However if the treated spots stand out from the surrounding wood, you may have to go back and apply Oxcon to the entire wall to even out the color.