

Technical Bulletin – Cleaning Stains From Brickwork

A common question often received is how to clean stains from brickwork. The first thing to remember is, do not automatically reach for an acidic brick cleaner used for post construction cleaning. Acidic brick cleaners are formulated to clean construction mortar smears from a new brick wall, and are not necessarily effective on many stains that you might encounter. Household cleaners, detergents, and cleaning solutions available at the grocery store can be effective in cleaning some common stains. A few typical stains you might encounter are:

Mold or Mildew

These stains are typically black or green and often occur on the northern walls of a home where there is little sun exposure. Use a solution of 3 parts water to 1 part household bleach (*Clorox*)

General Soiling or Mud

Use a solution of 1/2 cup laundry detergent and 1/2 cup TSP (trisodium phosphate) in a gallon of warm water (TSP is available at paint stores). In addition, *Arm and Hammer* baking soda will remove mud stains

Tar, Grease, Crayon

Use *Goof-Off Heavy Duty Spot Remover and Degreaser* or a tar remover available at your local hardware store or automotive store

Paint

Use an environmentally friendly paint stripper such as *Smart Strip (Peel Away)*, *CitriStrip*, or *Safest Stripper (3M)* available from your hardware store.

Smoke or Soot

Before cleaning, vacuum any dry soot before applying any solution. Use a chlorine based cleanser such as *Comet*, and scrub with a bristle brush.

Rust and Water Stains

Try *Zud* or *Bar Keepers Friend* cleanser or a rust stain remover such as *CLR* or *Lime Away* (these products are available at your local hardware or grocery store.)

Eggs

Try *Zud* or *Barkeepers Friend* cleanser. If stain persists, apply a solution of water and oxalic acid crystals (2 – 3 oz. per quart water). Rinse with a solution of 1 ½ oz. washing soda (sodium carbonate) per gallon water. (Oxalic acid is used as wood bleach and is available at woodworker supply stores, Washing soda e.g. *Arm & Hammer Super Washing Soda* is available in grocery stores laundry section). Sodium Carbonate is available at swimming pool supply stores. (Please note: *Zud* and *Barkeepers Friend* contains Oxalic acid)

When using any of the above solutions allow some time for the chemicals to dwell. Scrub with a stiff bristle brush (never use a wire brush). Always pre-test in an inconspicuous section of your wall first. Rinse thoroughly with water when finished. These are just a few examples but for more information on dealing with common stains on brick refer to the BIA Technical Note 20.

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If the methods above are ineffective there are also proprietary cleaners available such as those made by EaCo Chem, call (800) 313-8505 or visit www.eachchem.com, that deal with virtually every type of stain you might encounter. These proprietary cleaners are specifically formulated for a given problem and are typically more aggressive than the solutions referenced above. These products are intended for use by building professionals.

Before you try proprietary brick cleaners, try some of the more readily available chemicals or household detergents you might already have available at home. Please be aware however, that some of the products referenced above are poisonous or otherwise hazardous, so please use caution, read all label directions, and protect your eyes and skin from exposure.