The most popular chemical used today by roof cleaners is still “bleach” or sodium hypochlorite. It is also the chemical of choice of ARMA, the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association.¹ But saying that today’s roof shingles are primarily made of asphalt is no longer true.

Over the last 30 years or so manufactures have been adding more and more additional ingredients to shingle make up to produce a laminated product of specialized papers, fiberglass, and organic materials such as limestone, with only a small amount of asphalt to even be left in the single of today.

Limestone is one of the major reasons Gloeocapsa Magma, or roof algae, has become a more noticeable problem to home owners and a boon to roof washers. These black streaks are unsightly and, if left untreated, will literally eat the singles apart, since the algae consumes the limestone as it grows. The dark coloration seen is the protective UV covering of the algae as it spreads.

Everyone knows high pressure washing is not favored for shingle washing since high pressure can damage shingles by removing the granular surface and can void the manufactures warranty of the home owners roof. So today the industry applies other wash systems that can come in various forms.

**Sodium Hydroxide**

Some contractors still use sodium hydroxide, one of the first chemicals found in roof cleaners. Sodium hydroxide is a high alkaline product, sometimes called lye or caustic soda. If used in high concentrations and left to sit on any type of asphalt it can loosen or dissolve the bond of the shingle and granules since sodium hydroxide will break down petroleum-based products like asphalt. However, fewer and fewer of today’s shingles are made with much asphalt.

And it is not to say that sodium hydroxide products cannot be used to clean many types of roofing materials. Sodium hydroxide does clean the dirt, mold and algae, but cleaning solutions must be used at proper dilution rates and limited time durations, and must be

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thoroughly rinsed with high flow rates – but not high pressure rates – to remove the chemical, thus stopping any residual action.

The problem with sodium hydroxide is that if it is not completely removed from the surface – even after it has dried – it can be activated again and, once wet, continues its normal chemical reaction on petroleum based products. But sodium hydroxide is a fine product to use for cleaning tile, concrete or slate roof materials.

**Sodium Hypochlorite**

Now back to sodium hypochlorite. This system is not without some problems and new nay sayers of its use like to bring these up. Yes sodium hypochlorite will just become salt once the water has evaporated. If allowed to flood or cover plants without proper dilution, it can cause damage to the plant roots and leaves. If handled properly, it will not.

If used at high concentrations and left to sit on asphalt shingles, sodium hypochlorite can cause deterioration to them just like bleach does to clothes fibers with repeated washings. But if used at proper dilutions, plants treated by pre- and post- rinsing and complete rinsing of the solution from the roof at the time of cleaning, then these issues are just scare tactics used against contractors that use sodium hypochlorite. Also, I need to note that a small amount of sodium hydroxide is found in the 12% sodium hypochlorite sold today as a stabilizer of the mix.

**Sodium Percarbonate**

Today you hear the words “Soft Wash” used a lot. And this phrase can mean more than one thing. To some, a soft wash is just the fact that they are just using increased gpm (gallons per minute) of water to flush cleaning solutions off the roof instead of using a high psi (pounds per square inch) of water pressure to rinse the chemicals off – or, as others call it, a low pressure wash. So even sodium hydroxide or sodium hypochlorite contractors may say they are soft or low-pressure washers.

Others say soft wash is in fact no water rinsing at all. Instead, it’s just a spray on then let nature takes it course by allowing air moisture and rain to do the rinsing. With many of these products, it is sodium percarbonate that is doing the work.

This oxygen-based system starts to work only as it is first mixed and applied with water to the roof surface. Since the carbonated action quickly stops once the chemical reaction with water is done, further or later rinsing of the product from off the roof will not matter. It is also the product of choice for cleaning wood shake roofs and is where the process was expanded to now include asphalt shingle roofs.

This relatively new player to the game is gaining ground with contractors pushing a “green” environmentally-friendly business focus. But even sodium percarbonate is mined from the ground as Trona, and has chemical treatments to purify it. It, like oil, is a limited resource that creates waste “tailings” that can be harmful to the environment.

I am not saying that moving to a supposed more eco-friendly cleaning product is not good for everyone. Rather, all three of these chemical cleaning methods have a place and do work. Those that try to bad mouth another contractor’s methods should be careful or may find that in just a very few years that his own prefect method has become the wrong way to do it.

*Linda Chambers* is Brand and Sales Manager for Soap Warehouse, where she has worked since 2007. Linda enjoys writing articles for industry publications, blogs and social media. She also travels for the company, exhibiting at trade shows and events. Visit the company’s website at SoapWarehouse.biz.

Twenty years ago, bleach and water was combined with surfactants, algaecides and residual inhibitors into the first soft washing solution. It was sprayed directly from an agricultural style tank sprayer to remove mildew, bacteria and other organic stains from building roofs and exteriors.

Soft washing revolutionized the roof and exterior cleaning industry by allowing more carefully metered chemical solutions to be applied to building surfaces for the benefit of cleaning that surface chemically without pressure. Because of that, in the last two decades, soft washing has become the most important change to the mobile exterior cleaning industry, since the downstream injector.

So how do you truly define soft washing? There is quite a lot of controversy surrounding what constitutes soft washing technique and equipment. Let’s start with what soft washing can and cannot clean so that we understand what we are trying to accomplish by utilizing soft washing as a cleaning method.

Soft washing was initially created as a cleaning technique for safely removing algae stains from shingle roofs. By nature, shingle roofs are designed to make a home’s roofing structure more resistant to damage from the elements, thereby protecting the inside of the home. The shingle roofing system is made up generally of three parts: fiberglass sheets, petroleum adhesive and ceramic or stone aggregate. These shingles are placed on top of a petroleum-based tarpaper – often called “roofing felt” – which protects the wood sheeting or deck of the roof from moisture. All of this roofing anatomy quickly degrades except for the topmost and most important ingredient of a roofing shingle system, the aggregate.

Roofing aggregate is pressed into the hot asphalt- or petroleum-based adhesive on top of a shingle and it becomes a protective barrier for nature to attack and slowly eat away during a shingle roof’s lifecycle. It largely protects the roofing system from two weathering elements: rain and storms, and UV degradation. This aggregate reflects the sun’s rays from the roof and over time is designed to weather away little by little completing the service life of the...
shingle roof system. This, in many cases, takes over 30 years.

Some U.S. regions experience hailstorms, which strip away large amounts of aggregate from the shingle roof system, leading to decreased service life. In these cases, roofs are often replaced because of loss of value from the roof system.

Pressure washers are a mechanical duplication of this natural attack on a shingle roof system. Shingle roof manufacturers recognize this and have, in many cases, written into their warranties that any pressure washing of a shingle roof will void the manufacturer’s warranty.

Addressing this concern is what drove the invention of soft washing. Soft washing is actually much more closely associated to pest control than to the pressure washing industry. In fact, when I developed soft washing back in 1991, I had been involved in the nursery industry, growing and marketing ornamental plants for seven years. I took my degree in horticulture and my experience treating plants for fungal and bacterial infections and applied it to rooftop staining issues. In 1991, that experience and training was used to develop the first completely chemical roof cleaning system, the Mallard System.

The Mallard System

The Mallard System treated rooftop infestations like a pest, not a stain, by treating the issue at the root of the problem by actually killing the rooftop fungus and leaving behind inhibitors to aid in keeping the fungus from coming back. Many believe that merely spraying a bleach-and-water solution on a roof’s surface will achieve a thorough and lasting cleaning result. It will not. Though many soft wash solutions contain some sodium hypochlorite (bleach), that bleach alone will not obtain a 100 percent kill ratio against rooftop microbes which cause staining. In a true soft washing application, bleach is only used to achieve two things: to aid the soft-washing pro in determining what surfaces have been treated thoroughly, and to create an instant clean effect. In actuality, most of the algae, mold, mildew and bacteria is left behind on the surface and is now just bleached clear. Rain and other weathering elements will remove the dying microbes later.

In time, as I cleaned more and more roofs, this soft wash cleaning solution dripped down onto driveways, wood fences, soffits, pool decks and more. I began to see the potential for cleaning other surfaces. What was conceived as an answer for safely and effectively cleaning roofs was now seen as a way to perform maintenance cleanings throughout a homeowner’s or businesses’ property on many surfaces.

Soft washing became a quick and effective way to treat and clean away any organic-based stain from a building’s surface, especially where pressure washing would damage roofs, paint, wood, EAFIS or other delicate surfaces. The list of building infestations and stains began to grow. Mold, mildew, algae, fungus, bacteria, viruses, germs, mosses, lichens, insects, organic soiling and more were easily removed with the soft washing technology. That explains the why and the what.

Now to truly understand the technique you have to understand some background I have already touched on. In 1984, I began my high school career as the son of a high school dropout that became a super entrepreneur. My father was a very successful businessman who owned and sold several successful service businesses. I entered high school with no real desire to graduate or excel and was mostly concerned with growing my hair out, playing in bands and chasing girls. My sophomore year, I was 16 and READY to drop out and join the family business. I had started my first semester, had an elective that I hated, and was still within the window transferring to another class. The only other elective open was a Horticulture 1 agriculture class. Well anything was better than what I was in so I gleefully transferred into Hort 1.

That class came with an opportunity to join the Future Farmers of America, and my teacher thrust me into being one of the chapter’s officers. That changed my life’s direction forever. By the time I graduated from high school, I was blessed with many FFA honors. Simultaneously – through dual enrollment ag classes, high school classes,
local ag and nursery jobs, and FFA leadership – I gained a degree in horticulture that included 720 hours of instruction.

Basically, when I saw what was growing on roofs, I only saw one way to attack it – the same way we attacked the same microbes growing on plants. Spray it!

So soft washing technique is based strongly in the spray-and-kill-it approach. The application of a chemical to kill an alien invader. The inoculation for the virus. The cure for the disease. Soft washing is and will always be the application of a chemical to a surface where the chemical does all of the killing and cleaning of the microbe. Soft washing chemicals need only be applied to clean. No pressure is needed for the cleaning, only for the application. Anywhere the chemical can reach will be cleaned by the chemical. The chemical is not selective. It cleans whatever it comes in contact with.

**Soft Washing Equipment**

In the same way you cannot treat simply half of a home to cure a roach problem, you cannot treat just half a roof or half a wall to achieve any kind of lasting result against these microbial invaders. Soft wash solutions go deeper than just the surface of the building material and/or roof; it seeps into every crevice and pore. That’s why it can last up to four to six times longer that pressure washing.

Soft washing equipment, therefore, looks much like pest-control equipment. It is not modified pressure washing equipment! Downstream injectors will not allow for solutions strong enough or customizable enough to treat as effectively as soft washing, agricultural style, spraying equipment.

There is great debate on this and I want to clear this up. Pressure washers are gas guzzling, loud, obtrusive, damaging, wasteful, antiquated, 80-year old technology that is not in any way soft washing. Yes, you can turn down the pressure on a pressure washer. Yes you can change your tips to a higher GPM orifice. You can even inject chemicals into a pressure washer’s hose to pre-treat a surface, but ultimately when a stain resists cleaning by chemical, either the pressure is increased, the tip is changed or the heat is turned up and brute force is utilized to clean the surface. In many cases the surface loses to impatience or ignorance.

The simplest soft washing rig consists of just a few parts: the tank, the pump, the...
hose and finally the spray gun. There are more sophisticated configurations available, allowing for more options and wider mixes of differing soft wash solutions, but the typical tank sprayer will work nicely. You know you are soft washing when your spraying system has everything to do with delivery of the soft washing chemicals and nothing to do with the cleaning of the surface itself. Soft wash systems merely deliver a potent mix of chemicals that treat the building exterior surface and the chemical does all of the cleaning, removing the organic based stain.

Now don’t get me wrong. I realize that there is great use for traditional pressure washing. For heavy equipment cleaning, paint prep, hood cleaning, fleet washing and the like, pressure washing may be the only alternative. However, for surfaces being attacked by microbes as we have discussed, pressure washing may often accelerate or worsen the damage of these microbes that you are trying to clean away. Pressure washing works on many non-organic stains like rust, oil, grease, minerals and such. There is still a place for it. However, 8 am, Main Street USA on a Saturday morning is not one of them.

Pressure washing is facing huge obstacles as we face government interaction with wastewater laws (Clean Water Act), as well as water restrictions as cities grow and groundwater sources dry up. Fossil fuels and our dependence on them are also creating an atmosphere where we need to look for alternatives to using gas-driven cleaning platforms. Water and Gas drive huge discussions about our stewardship of our resources and will eventually become negatives when consumers choose an exterior cleaning company. Add to that the cumbersome size of many professional pressure-washing trailers as well as the noise they create, pressure washing is facing some tough days ahead. As of the writing of this article, pressure washing is specifically named as a restricted activity in Florida’s Stage Three Water Restrictions and seven counties are now within those restrictions.

Beyond understanding what soft washing actually is, now we all need to understand that careful chemical choices need to be made while soft washing. Biodegradable chemicals are available making soft washing even more environmentally responsible. Soft washing also uses one-third the water a pressure washer will use. In fact soft washing, because of its long-lasting clean, allows a surface to stay clean with less frequent visits from the cleaning company, further reinforcing less visits, meaning less water and less chemicals. In soft washing, less is definitely more when it comes to being good stewards of our environment.

Here’s the bottom line. Why modify a pressure washer trying to soft wash when adding real soft washing equipment is so inexpensive? A basic system can be assembled for less than a thousand dollars and will pay for itself within one week off of profits. Training and chemicals are widely available. Seminars happen throughout the year and groups like The Soft Wash Community at softwashsystems.activeboard.com exist for support and encouragement.

Soft washing is becoming a preferred way to perform maintenance cleanings while implementing good environmental stewardship guidelines. Soft washing shouldn’t be ignored. You can either buy a ticket or you can stand on the track, but one way or another this train is going to impact your life. Why not let it be a positive impact to your bottom line?

AC Lockyer is the former owner of Mallard Systems and TerraClean where he was responsible for sales in excess of $27 million dollars in soft washing. He was awarded the Florida 100 in ’99 & ’00 as well as the Central Florida Up & Comers Award in 2001. AC enjoys fishing and in 2006 won the Redfish Tour National Championship. AC is a husband and a father to his two children. AC now owns SoftWash Systems a company dedicated to supplying equipment, chemicals, education and support to the soft wash professional.
There are numerous types of abrasive blasting options available for industrial use today. Growing in popularity is the use of dry ice blasting as a way to remove the toughest dirt and grime from a wide range of indoor surfaces. This fairly new alternative to other popular options, such as sandblasting, has truly changed the face of the power cleaning industry by providing a way to achieve the same results, but with a much lower impact.

**WHAT IS DRY ICE BLASTING?**

Dry ice blasting consists of rice-sized pellets of carbon dioxide accelerated at supersonic speeds toward a contaminated surface. The pellets power through the contaminant and, once striking the underlying surface, create mini explosions that lift off the contaminants. Compared to sandblasting, the impact on the underlying surface is minimized because the pellets released by the dry ice blast are much softer than grains of sand. Sandblasting tends to score the surface whereas dry ice blasting is completely nonabrasive.

This state-of-the-art process also minimizes waste because shortly after hitting the surface, the pellets evaporate into carbon dioxide gas. This is in contrast to sandblasting, which results in leftover grains of sand that must be removed.
DRY ICE BLASTING FOR INDOOR CLEANING NEEDS

Dry ice cleaning has proven very versatile in its application due to its gentleness and lack of waste or runoff. A wide range of industries employ dry ice blasting, from the aircraft, automotive and transport industries to numerous others that require more sensitive cleaning methods due to their presence in protected indoor environments. The following list of industries highlights the assortment of uses for this innovative process, along with its adaptability to each business’s individual cleaning needs:

Food and beverage. The food and beverage industry is an obvious candidate for the dry ice cleaning method simply because of its need for safe and non-toxic cleaning. The buildup of food waste and grease that can collect over time is no match for a dry ice blast, which will leave equipment in a pristine and sterile condition.

Foundry. With dry ice cleaning, the typical hazardous waste that is produced within this industry can be greatly reduced by the regular removal of excess grease, dust, ink or carbon from production equipment. Additionally, the production schedule will never be impacted due to a planned cleaning.

Historical restoration projects. Because of the immense sensitivity of historical restoration projects, this nonabrasive technique has received much praise since becoming more prevalent for this use over recent years. Historians can now breathe easier as they attempt to restore items and buildings back to their original look and grandeur.

Packaging equipment. When production in a packaging plant must be halted for cleaning, management can expect a negative impact to the bottom line. Dry ice cleaning is especially appealing for cleaning wax or clay buildup on the critical machinery in a packaging plant, because the process doesn’t require taking machinery offline and won’t interfere with production schedules.

Plastics. In addition to allowing production to continue with no interruptions, dry ice blasting also meets the detailed cleaning requirements of the plastics industry. Molds, extruder screws, mold machines, ovens and mixers can all be thoroughly cleaned without leaving any secondary waste that is common when using the sandblasting technique.

Pulp and paper. The intricate nature of the equipment and machinery involved in the pulp and paper industry makes dry ice cleaning the preferred method of power cleaning, as it allows equipment to be cleaned “as is,” with no disassembly. Furthermore, the dirt, soot, grease and oil buildup removed via a dry ice blast can constitute a safety risk if not cleaned regularly.

The true allure of dry ice blasting lies in its simplicity. There are many benefits to choosing this 100 percent environmentally friendly method for your power cleaning needs – one of which being that your business and its workforce will remain entirely operational when the dry ice blast service is being performed. This fact can translate into savings of thousands of dollars when factoring in the usual downtime that is needed for more conventional methods of power cleaning.

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Roof Cleaning
Spraying Techniques

By Doug Rucker, Owner of Clean & Green Solutions and Founder of the Pressure Cleaning School, www.PressureCleaningSchool.com

One of the most important factors in determining how profitable and successful your roof cleaning business will be is your spraying technique, method of application, and amount of mix you apply, along with your pricing, of course.

Ask ten different roof cleaning contractors how they spray a roof and you will probably get ten different answers. And none are necessarily more right or wrong than the other. Top to bottom, side to side, from the ladder, from the ground only, one application, two applications, two applications with a spot follow up, and on and on the list goes.

Everyone has his or her own method and technique for spraying a roof. All of them work. Because it is the cleaning mix that is doing the work, as long as you’re getting the mix to the roof, and the mix is good, the roof will clean up. But how you spray can and will determine how much mix you use, your amount of runoff, plant damage and how long you will be on the job.

For of this article, I am going to talk about how I spray and how I teach students at The Pressure Cleaning School to spray an asphalt shingle roof, which is about 90 percent of the roofs we do. I’ll discuss first how I spray a one- and two-story walkable roof and then a two-story unwalkable roof.

One and Two Story Walkable

For me, the key to applying the mix is to apply thin coats so as just to dampen the shingles. I am not looking to flood the roof with mix, I just want the shingles damp or moist. Whenever I see streams of mix running down I always feel that I am applying too much mix and will try to adjust the amount I am spraying. I realize runoff is inevitable, but large amounts are what I am trying to avoid. My goal is no more than one to 1.5 gallons in my buckets under any downspouts if gutters are present.

Step 1: Starting at the gutter line, I will spray out the first three to four shingles up moving horizontally across the roof. I position
my body and feet so that I am facing back to the top of the roof as much as I comfortably can.

**Step 2:** With my gun pointing up toward the top of the roof, I then coat the first three to four shingles, again moving horizontally across the roof.

**Step 3:** Once I have reached the edge, I then will spray – with my body and gun pointing toward the roof and not toward the non-roof area – where grass or plants may be below.

**Step 4:** Moving up to the top the roof, I spray out the edge of the roof, as I did the bottom, three to four shingles in.

**Step 5:** Once the bottom and edge are sprayed, I then spray the rest of the roof, from bottom to top.

As I spray, I am applying nice, even, consistent applications. In the first application, I am not looking to add more mix to one spot than another. Once I have sprayed an entire area or section – say the front of the roof – I then go back and hit the really dark areas again, before moving onto another section.

Once I have completely applied my first application, I then check the section I sprayed first. If this area is still wet or damp, I will wait until it has dried a little more. Sometimes I will come down and take a break, or if we are doing a house wash as well, I will hand the gun down to my ground man and let him spray out the back and side of the house.

The reason I do not spray again if the roof is still pretty damp or wet is because it is a waste of mix. I go by this: “If it’s still wet, it’s still cleaning.” All I am trying to do when I clean a roof is keep it damp. Applying more mix on top of an already damp or wet roof is not going to clean it any better or faster.

Once the first coat is nearly dry – I never wait for it to completely dry unless it’s the really hot part of summer – I then apply the second coat, adding just a little more to the dark stains. I spray the second coat the same as I did the first coat. Once the second coat is applied – and this coat usually takes less time to apply than the first – I wait at least 15 to 20 minutes to allow that coat to work. Then any leftover brown stains (dead algae) I hit again quickly so the roof is completely clean.

I understand some roof cleaning contractors will explain to the customer that those brown stains will come off with the rain – and they will – but for the money I am charging, I just prefer that the roof be totally clean before I leave. My before and after pictures are better too.

You will always have some roofs that will take more time than others. For example, thinner shingles are going to absorb faster than the thicker shingles. I have just found that the key for me is giving a little time between coats instead of continual spraying until the roof comes clean.

**Two Story**

Spraying a two story house is, of course, totally different than spraying a one story. More often than not, the two story homes around here have very steep and I will not walk them. I am very careful about what I will walk and what I will not. If I have any hesitation about walking a roof, I will not. I will just spray it from the gutter line.

Whenever I spray a roof from the gutter line standing on a ladder, I try to copy as best I can the way I spray a one story. Using my zero tip, I will coat the first three to four shingles up to the left and right of me. As the shingles get wet and I get closer to the area where I am standing, I will switch to a fan spray tip, and spray the areas immediately to the left, right and directly in front of me.

For the area directly underneath the ladder stabilizer, I can barely pull the trigger on my gun, allowing for only small stream to coat this area. This prevents the mix from
splattering onto my face and clothes. I like using a trigger style gun I get from Paul at www.powerwashstore.com because it allows me better control and I can stop the flow immediately versus a ball valve. If I drop the gun, I also know that the flow will stop immediately versus not being able to turn off the ball valve.

Once I have coated all the areas to the left and right, I then start spraying from the bottom up using my fan tips or the zero tip depending on the distance I need. This spraying technique requires changing the tips somewhat frequently. I realize I could use the zero tip and probably spray it out much faster, but that would also require using a lot more mix. Also when I see the mix really start to flow down the roof, I will stop spraying for a few seconds to allow it to soak in. So, there is some starting and stopping with this technique. This is another reason I find the trigger gun so much more convenient than a ball valve.

Once I have sprayed that section out completely, I will then come down and either spray out another section of the roof, clean a section of the house if that is part of the job, or just take a break. In any event, I allow my first application to sit at least 15 to 20 minutes before I will spray it again. The second application is done the same as the first and then the third is done just hitting any spots that may need it.

Often I will come across a two-story roof that is walkable, and if so, I will spray it just like I do a one-story roof.

Often, a two story unwalkable roof will still have a “route” I can take and get to the peak, the ridge line, and I can spray everything from there. When doing this, I use the zero tip for 90 percent of the application. BUT I will start spraying at the bottom and spray up towards me, stopping and starting as needed to control runoff. There is just something about new mix hitting the already applied mix that seems to help control runoff.

Again, I realize that everybody has different ways to spray out a roof and I certainly do not advocate that there is one set way. Each individual will adapt his or her own methods and system; this is just the way I prefer to do it. I realize that it may seem to take more time, and I am OK with that. The last thing I want to hear my customer say when I am done is, “You’re done already?” Hopefully some of the new (and old) roof cleaning contractors can pick up something here that will help them make their business better.

No matter how you decide to spray a roof, two things are essential to your roof cleaning business:

1. Develop systems and procedures so that you are efficient from the time you pull up to the time you leave
2. Develop a consistent spray pattern. This will help to prevent you from missing some areas and applying to much in others. It doesn’t matter as much the pattern you develop, just develop one and be consistent.

Doug Rucker is the owner of Clean and Green Solutions in Kingwood, Texas, and Vice-President of the United Association of Mobile Cleaning Contractors (UAMCC). Because he enjoys helping, teaching and mentoring those who are new to the pressure washing industry, Doug started the Pressure Cleaning School in 2011 where he provides both class training as well as one-on-one instruction. To learn more, visit the school’s website at www.PressureCleaningSchool.com.
All the news stories talk about the recession forcing us back to the “basics.” Stuff like actually saving money, living within your means, spending time with your family – boring basics like that. So it got your SFS team to thinking about marketing and some of the old tried and true stuff that we did 30 years ago. The funny thing is our SFS members tell us the same marketing tricks are still working for them! Hmmm...

So let’s talk “door hangers.” That’s right, those old fashioned marketing pieces that are actually physically placed at neighbor’s houses (or businesses) using shoe leather instead of bulk mail, newspapers or the Internet. (I’m going to focus on the good old “five around” next to jobs you are doing instead of the mass inserting of flyers door to door in selected neighborhoods. Which can also be a valuable marketing technique. But that’s another article!)

We always found the key was the title. Ours always referred back to us having worked in their neighbor’s home or business. This mentioning their neighbor was both subtly reassuring and added a bit of peer pressure. (Hey, honey, they didn’t attack Marge when they were alone with her so maybe you’ll be safe too!)

NOTE: One warning here. Do NOT write down the name of the neighbor you’re cleaning for that day on the door hanger. Some people correctly view this using of their name as an invasion of their privacy. (Don’t ask us how we learned this!) Or if you do ask if you can use their name then this request may come across as unwanted pressure.

Our door hangers had a big title that said, “Today, your neighbor cleaned up big!” along with a eye-catching and dramatic color photo. We found this little play on words caused folks to at least check the body of the message.

We also put a special discount offer on the back of the door hanger. Today we would put at least a $20.00 off coupon. (Normally a specific dollar amount is better than a percentage.) And here is a way to get “double duty” out of your door hangers.

Unless the property is specifically posted “No Trespassing” (or has a snarling dog behind the fence) you can leave something in the door. BUT it should not be visible from the street. A good way to do this is just slip it under the storm door. And of course everyone should know it is a federal offense to put unstamped stuff in a mail box!

So go ahead. We challenge you- try the boring old “five-around”- one on either side of the house you are working on and the three homes across the street. Then report back on how it works for you- even after all these years we say basic human nature doesn’t change. Let us know your thoughts.

Your Strategies for Success Team

Strategies for Success (SFS) is an intensive five day, college level business management and marketing seminar designed specifically for the cleaning, restoration and decorative concrete industries. SFS also includes free lifetime support and consulting from the SFS Team. For more information call 800-400-9473 or go to www.SFS.JonDon.com
The roof cleaning industry has grown exponentially in recent years as homeowners have become more aware of the fact that their roof algae stains can be removed. This expansion has attracted many small business entrepreneurs who see it as a potentially lucrative endeavor. All too often, though, this rush to earn money results in a roof cleaning service that has not laid the groundwork for safe procedures and operations. These owners and operators would be wise to lay out some basic safety tips for themselves and their employees before anyone even steps foot on a roof.

First and foremost, the most obvious risk associated with roof cleaning is the potential for a life-altering or life-ending fall. Many people wrongly assume that only two-story roofs are dangerous, but there are countless people who die or are paralyzed by falling from single story ranch roofs every year. If you land on your head it doesn’t take much height at all for there to be disastrous consequences. Navigating a roof is particularly dangerous when a cleaning is in progress because there are slippery chemicals and hoses to contend with.

To protect yourself from falling you should work with a safety harness system whenever possible to act as a “safety net.” You should also invest in a pair of roofing shoes that are designed for maximum grip and slip resistance. I personally recommend the Cougar Paws brand. You’d also be wise to hold your trigger gun in one hand while holding chemical line slack in the other to avoid tripping over it. In addition, always make sure you’re moving in a forward direction and not backward. I’ve had a few close calls while moving backwards and tripping over vent stacks or other roof obstacles. Finally, leave yourself a dry path to exit the roof, otherwise you’ll be dealing with slippery chemicals as you attempt to walk down to the ladder and mount it. You can spray the path with chemical behind you during your final exit.

Ladder safety is a topic unto itself. You’d be wise to use a ladder standoff device at all times, not only to protect the homeowner’s gutter but also to stabilize the ladder during your ascent and descent. Also make sure that a helper is at the bottom of the ladder to help keep it stable while you’re climbing it. In
addition, try to extend the ladder at least three or four feet above the gutter line so that it will be easier to mount it from the roof surface upon job completion. Finally, if you can afford it, try to purchase ladders that don’t conduct electricity. Many a roof contractor has been injured or died as a result of accidental power line contact.

Last but not least is the issue of roof cleaning chemical exposure. No matter what product or solution you’re using, some of it is bound to come into contact with your skin or mucus membranes and you need to be prepared for this. Always wear goggles, a NIOSH-approved mask, and heavy-duty gloves. I realize that roof work can be very hot but if at all possible it would be wise to wear a long sleeved shirt and long pants to protect your skin from chemical splash. Also, on windy days it’s inevitable that chemical mist will find its way onto your neck, ears, ankles, and other exposed areas so try to carry a dry rag or towel with you so you can wipe it away as the need arises. The last thing you want to do is allow the chemical to sit on your skin for extended periods of time. If it’s a big job take multiple breaks so you can climb down and give your face and skin a good rinse with the garden hose. Taking breaks is just a good idea in general because roof work can be very hot and you need to replenish your body with cool water whenever possible. The last place you want to experience heat stroke is forty feet off the ground on a slippery roof.

Those are some basic safety guidelines that you’d be wise to employ if you have your own roof cleaning business. If you’re not spending as much time preparing for safety as you are for profits then you’re setting yourself up for fall (in more than one way). Lay out clear rules for yourself and your people and make sure they are adhered to. Every other aspect of your business comes a distant second.

Neo Johnson is an author for the Guide to Roof Cleaners and Services.
Roof Algae Cleaning Myths Debunked
by RoofCleaningChemicals.com

There’s a lot of false information about roof algae cleaning floating around. Roof cleaning is still a relatively new industry and most homeowners aren’t that familiar with it. But it’s time to set the record straight. It’s time to blast some common roof cleaning myths out of the water once and for all. Here are the top ten myths about roof stain removal.

1. Black roof stains are caused by tar, acid, dirt, or jet fuel.

Roof stains are caused by a hardy type of blue-green algae called Gloeocapsa Magma. All it takes is for one algae spore to land on your shingles, take hold and then it’s off to the races. The algae will continue to multiply and spread, its growth fed by the limestone filler in the shingles and moisture.

2. Algae on roof shingles signals that it’s time for a new roof.

Simply the presence of algae stains does not necessarily equate with needing a new roof. In many cases, all a roof needs is a good, professional cleaning to restore its original look and health.

You might notice that roofers don’t like roof cleaners very much, and this is because we keep them honest. If a roofer tells you that you need a whole new roof just because of some algae staining, tell him to take a walk and look up your local non-pressure roof cleaning company instead. You’ll save a huge amount of money.

Most people are shocked when they see how much better their home looks after a roof cleaning. I think this is because most homeowners have gotten so used to seeing the stains on their roof that they’ve completely forgotten how good it once looked.

I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve cleaned the roof of a house that had been on the market for months with virtually no activity. Within days of the cleaning, it finally started getting serious offers.

I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again that no matter how beautiful your landscaping, no matter how clean your windows, no matter how precise the painted trim, if your roof is covered in filthy algae stains, it will still ruin your curb appeal, if not in your eyes then in the eyes of your family, friends, neighbors, and potential buyers.

3. Roof algae removal will have no real impact on a home’s curb appeal.

4. Roof algae is only a cosmetic issue so it can be ignored for now.

If not cleaned and kept at bay, roof algae has the ability to shave years off the life of your shingles. It’s important to remember that roof algae is a living organism that needs food to continue to grow. Guess what the favorite food of roof algae is? That’s right – your shingles!

Shingle makers now use limestone filler in the manufacturing process, which the algae just loves to chew on. This will result in premature loss of shingle granules and general deterioration.

Shingle granules are vital to the health of your roof and home because they work to deflect UV rays and heat away from your roof’s surface. If they are gone or covered with algae, then you will have a hotter attic and higher AC bills. You’ll also have to replace the roof a lot sooner. With the average new roof topping $10,000, it’s a no-brainer to keep your shingles clean and functional for a fraction of the cost.

5. The best way to go about removing roof algae is with high pressure.

Next to positioning your home in the path of a tornado, power washing your roof is the worst thing you could possibly do to it. Just because your concrete, deck, and brick siding were pressure cleaned to remove algae stains doesn’t mean you should do it to your shingles.

Don’t you have any idea how flimsy and fragile your shingles are? Don’t you realize how many thousands or tens of thousands of shingle granules will pop right off with the use of a power washing wand? It blows my mind that people think this is a good idea.

Yes, blasting your roof with 2000 psi will remove some of the stains, but if it removes some of your actual roof in the process then what’s the point? If you bought a roof algae remover and somewhere in the instructions it says that you should walk up on your roof with a power washing wand in hand and unleash hell on your shingles, then it’s safe to say that you purchased the wrong product.

6. Chemical roof cleaning will damage shingles, gutters, and landscaping.

If you’re using the right chemicals with the proper procedures and rinsing techniques then you have nothing to fear. I’ve cleaned hundreds of roofs with non-pressure chemical methods and have never caused damage to someone’s home. I also only clean roofs with a helper present whose sole responsibility is to rinse the heck out of the grass, bushes, and perimeter landscaping so that there’s absolutely no chance of plant damage. We usually do such a good job of rinsing that homeowners notice that their landscaping actually looks especially healthy and vibrant in the days following the cleaning.

ARMA (the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association) and GAF (North America’s largest shingle maker) both recommend that shingles be cleaned with non-pressure, chemical methods, and any home inspector worth his salt would also concur.

7. It’s only necessary to clean the sections of the roof that have visible stains.

Just because you can’t see algae stains on certain parts of the roof doesn’t mean that it’s not already there and beginning to develop. Keep in mind that in its early stages roof algae is completely invisible to the naked eye. It’s not until the more advanced stages that it actually turns black and becomes visible. So if you can see algae on even one section of your roof that means that it’s probably already taking hold on your entire roof.

I always try to explain this to my customers but occasionally I still get people who don’t believe it and demand that I only do a spot-clean to remove visible stains. I reluctantly oblige their demands but am never surprised when I drive by a year later to see the untreated areas now completely covered in black algae! Then they usually call me back with the standard, “You were right. Can you please come back and clean the whole roof as you originally recommended?”
8. Ambient temperature has no effect on the effectiveness of a roof.

If you’re using the correct chemical mixture, then it will be most effective when the temperature is above 50 degrees. Below 50, the power of the solution drops off rapidly. If you absolutely must have the roof cleaned on a day when it’s right around 50 or a little bit lower, just keep in mind that the chemicals will need to sit for a little bit longer on the roof to be effective. So instead of giving it five minutes to kill the algae give it 15. Then reapply if necessary. On the flip side, if it’s an extremely hot day you may find that your chemical is evaporating before it even has a chance to kill the algae. In this situation you can simply soak the roof with water to cool it down before applying the chemicals.

9. Roof cleaning is an easy DIY project that any homeowner can do in an afternoon.

There’s nothing easy or quick about roof cleaning. In fact, if you approach it with a cavalier attitude, you run a good chance of injuring yourself. If you want to have any chance of cleaning your roof safely and effectively then you need to set out a clear plan of attack, have safety procedures in place, and, above all, take your time. Rushing through a roof cleaning only leads to trouble.

Unless you’re one of these guys that absolutely has to do every home improvement job on your own, I would highly recommend that you just find a qualified, non-pressure roof cleaning company in your area. Either you can hire somebody who has the equipment and experience to clean your roof in a few hours or you can spend an entire weekend doing it yourself and risking your life. Your choice.

10. Roof cleaning companies tend to overprice their work and take advantage of consumers.

I guess I’m always a little disappointed when I tell someone that it will cost $300-$500 to clean their roof and they give me attitude and insinuate that I’m somehow ripping them off. I think people hear that word “cleaning” and they think it should be cheap like carpet cleaning or house cleaning.

Think about it. Does a carpet cleaner spend three hours at your house sweating and getting sunburned? No. Does a carpet cleaner run the possibility of paralysis or death by simply doing his job? No. Does a carpet cleaner spend $100 on chemicals for every single job? No. Can a carpet cleaner offer you a guarantee that the treated surface will stay clean for years to come? No.

There’s so much more that goes into a professional roof cleaning than for any other kind of residential cleaning service that it’s really not even fair to lump them into the same category. As a matter of fact, I actually think that most roof cleaning companies come in too low with their prices when you consider all the variables involved.

I also challenge you to name one other home improvement service that can instantly transform a home’s curb appeal in a single afternoon for under $500. Can’t be done. When you consider that it not only makes your home more beautiful but also extends the life of your expensive roof by a matter of years, I think that having a roof cleaned is one of the smartest and most cost-effective things that a homeowner could possibly do to protect their biggest investment.

So now that I’ve educated you about the myths that surround the roof cleaning industry, I hope you’ll take these words of advice to heart because they represent the straightest talk about this topic that you’re going to find. I’m not here trying to sell a product. I’m telling you like it is because there are too many lies flying around. Either you can buy into one of the myths and be disappointed with the results or you can clean your shingles the right way and be satisfied with your new-looking, beautiful home that is free of roof algae.

RoofCleaningChemicals.com was established in 2008 with the goal of educating the public and other contractors about the proper procedures for cleaning a roof. Today they receive more than 6000 visitors a month.