



Pressure Washing: A Basic Guide to PSI Levels

by Paul Horsley, Publisher

Pressure washers are great for tackling tough cleaning jobs with a high-pressure blast of water. When pressure washing, however, it's important to remember that turning the washer on full force isn't always the way to go.

Using too much pressure on a deck, fence, siding or even concrete can result in permanent and unsightly damage, which is why it's important to understand the psi on your pressure washer and how it works.

WHAT PSI MEANS

Psi stands for pounds per square inch and measures how much water pressure your unit can produce. The higher the psi, the more cleaning power you have. Most pressure washers offer a psi range, allowing the operator to choose which pressure level best suits the task at hand, and even the cheapest models produce more than 20 times the pressure of a typical garden hose.

Pressure levels can range anywhere from 1,000 to 4,000 psi. When shopping for pressure washers, it's best to choose a model that provides more psi than you think you'll need, which will give you enough power to take care of extra-tricky stains and will prevent you from having to run your machine at full blast, which can wear it down over time.

Here's a look at basic recommended psi levels for common pressure washing jobs:

Up to 1,500 psi: The lowest pressure settings are best for pressure washing smaller surfaces such as charcoal grills, lawn furniture, bikes and cars, garden tools and other items that could be damaged by higher pressure. Generally, wood decks, etc., should be cleaned at low pressures to avoid damaging the surface.

1,500 to 2,000 psi: This is the sweet spot for pressure washing patios and siding, as higher pressure can gouge relatively soft surfaces, leaving ugly scars. However, when cleaning a wood deck or vinyl siding, remember that technique is as important as the psi setting; improper power washing technique can also leave blemishes, even if the correct psi is used.

2,000 to 3,000 psi: Larger areas such as driveways and walkways become much easier to clean when this psi range is used. Again, pay attention to your spraying technique; even concrete can sustain pressure washing damage if you're not careful.

3,000 to 4,000 psi: This psi range is where the heavy lifting happens. These settings are good for cleaning stripping paint and cleaning farm equipment, semi-trailers and concrete. The high pressure can be dangerous, however.

