

# Soft Washing Concrete

by AC Lockyer, Softwash Systems

The world of cleaning concrete has been dominated by pressure washing. Arguably the most effective way to remove many forms of soiling from concrete, pressure washing has its benefits. However, some maintenance cleanings can be completed without using high pressure washing.

Soft washing, by definition, is the application of cleaning chemicals from an agricultural-style sprayer in which the chemicals do all of the needed cleaning. Soft washing is not for restoration cleanings, but best suited for removing light soiling and/or fungal and bacteria infestations on surfaces.

Many flat concrete surfaces are infested with mold, mildew, fungus and bacteria. Sometimes a simple chemical treatment will clean and brighten those surfaces quickly and efficiently. Here are some steps to consider when trying to clean a flat concrete surface with soft washing.

- Can the surface be safely soft washed?
- Is this coated or uncoated concrete? If coated, is it with a chemical-resistant paint or coating? Does the coating need removed? It may need a restoration cleaning by a pressure washer to remove loose or peeling coatings.
- What borders the concrete? Are there storefront windows and trim? Is there landscaping? What care do I need to take to protect these items?
- What is the surface itself? Regular untreated concrete, river rock, cool decking, epoxy, etc. How textured or porous is the surface? Will the surface need rinsing?

Once these have been addressed, you can decide if soft washing is a plausible solution or if pressure washing is needed.

## Soft Washing Steps

1. Use a blower or broom to remove any debris from the surface.
2. Look for items like oil stains, gum and other individually-treatable stains.
  - Oil stains are easily removed using a non-

phosphate detergent and a scrub brush.

- Gum can also be removed in small amounts using a hand held torch and metal putty knife.

- Irrigation rust can be removed using an acid and water solution of 1 part acid, 2 parts water. (Avoid spraying bleach on acid; rinse thoroughly before soft washing)

3. Once the surface is prepped it may need to be cooled. Hot concrete evaporates chemicals before they can start to clean. Cool by pre-moistening the surface with a garden hose. The moist surface will also carry the chemicals deeper into crevices that may have been missed on dry concrete.

4. Use safety cones, wet floor signs and safety tape to avoid injuries.

5. Apply a bleach-and-water solution with surfactants to the surface in this solution: (50 gallon mix) 15 gallons of sodium hypochlorite bleach, 35 gallons water and 64 ounces of your favorite surfactant. Agitate in the tank to blend and spray lightly and consistently to the surface.

6. Trace in areas around landscaping by standing on the grass and tracing inward. This directs overspray toward the center of the concrete, not outward onto landscaping. Use a piece of wall shower board as a tracing tool to avoid chemicals resting on glass and/or anodized aluminum frames. Chemicals allowed to rest on these windows may damage the window or frame; at a minimum, it will create additional cleaning later.

7. Allow the chemicals to dwell for about 15 minutes, then rinse, or don't rinse, based on your desired end result, surface texture or exposure/safety concern.

Soft washing is great for removing basic organic-based stains like dirt, mildew, fungus, bacteria, leaf stains and alike on flat concrete surfaces. Soft washing is also a potent sanitizer for locker room and bathroom floors and tile. Next time you're getting ready to crank up the pressure washer ask yourself is this flat concrete a candidate for soft washing?

*AC Lockyer owns Softwash Systems, a company dedicated to supplying equipment, chemicals, education and support to the softwash professional.*