

## Cleaning and Sealing Interlocking Concrete Pavement—A Maintenance and Protection Guide

When properly installed, interlocking concrete pavements have very low maintenance and provide an attractive surface for decades. Under foot and vehicular traffic, interlocking concrete pavements become exposed to dirt, stains and wear. This is common to all pavements. This technical bulletin addresses various steps to insure the beauty of interlocking concrete pavements and to help restore their original

---

Stain removers, cleaners, and sealers may be purchased from a manufacturer, contractor, dealer or associate member of the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute.

---

appearance. These steps include removing stains, cleaning and sealing.

Stains on specific areas should be removed first. A cleaner should then be used to remove any efflorescence and dirt from the entire pavement. A newly

cleaned pavement can be an opportune time to seal it. In order to achieve maximum results, use stain removers, cleaners, and sealers specifically for concrete pavers. These may be purchased from a manufacturer, contractor, dealer or associate member of the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute.

### REMOVING STAINS

Commercial stain removers available specifically for concrete pavers provide a high degree of certainty in removing stains. Many kinds of stains can be removed while minimizing the risk of discoloring or damaging the pavers. The container label often provides a list of stains that can be removed. If there are questions, the supplier should be contacted for help with determining the effectiveness of the chemical in removing specific stains.

Identify the stains prior to applying the cleaner. A test application should be evaluated in a small inconspicuous stained area for cleaning effectiveness. Some stains may require repeated applications of the remover to achieve effective cleaning. This is often the case for deep set oil stains. If the pavement was sealed prior to staining, make sure that the cleaners will not remove or damage the existing sealer. With all stain removers, cleaners and sealers, the label directions and warnings should be read and carefully followed for all precautions, and for first aid.

Start removal of stains at the bottom of the pavement and work up the slope in manageable sections. By working up the slope, cleaning fluids will drain down the pavement. This technique assists in uniform removal while allowing the used cleaner to be rinsed away consistently. The surface remains dry ahead of the cleaner-soaked wet areas, allowing better visibility of the stains to be removed.

Take care in selecting and applying cleaning products, as acidic ones may harm vegetation and grass. These cleaners should not run onto vegetation. When using strong acidic stain removers or cleaners that might drain onto vegetation, spread some agricultural lime on the ground around the perimeter of the concrete pavers. This will help neutralize the



Figure 1. Many sealers enhance the appearance of concrete pavers and protect against staining.

cleaner and reduce the potential for damage to grass and/or vegetation. After cleaning, remove the lime from the vegetated ground in these areas.

### Removal of Common Stains

There are proprietary cleaning products specifically designed for concrete pavers. Many have been developed through extensive laboratory and field testing to ensure cleaning effectiveness. Using manufactured cleaning chemicals for specific stains relieves the user from the uncertainty of attaining the proper mixture of chemicals. These chemicals should be used whenever possible.

If no proprietary stain removal products are available, a comprehensive source of information on stain removal is a 28 page booklet entitled *Removing Stains from Concrete* by William H. Kuenning. It describes chemicals, detergents or poultice (scrubbing) materials recommended for removing particular stains, and the steps to be followed in removal. This publication recognizes that some of the treatments involve hazardous chemicals and it advises specific precautions. *Removing Stains from Concrete* is available from the Interlocking Concrete Pavement institute (ICPI).

Removal of several common stains from *Removing Stains from Concrete* are listed below (1). Most involve typical household chemicals. The information given is the best available at the time of writing. The ICPI disclaims any and all responsibility for the application of the information. The user is advised to use cleaners specifically made to remove stains that commonly occur on concrete pavers. They will likely be more effective.

*Asphalt and emulsified asphalt*—Chill with ice (if warm outside), scrape away and scrub the surface with scouring or abrasive powder. Rinse thoroughly with water.

*Cutback asphalt and roofing tar*—Use a poultice made with talc or diatomaceous earth. Mix with kerosene, scrub, let dry and brush off. Repeat as needed.

*Blood, candy, ketchup, mustard, grease drippings from food*—For stubborn stains, apply liquid detergent full strength and allow it to penetrate for 20-30 minutes. Scrub and rinse with hot water. Removal is easier if these stains are treated immediately.

*Caulking*—Scrape off excess and scrub with a poultice of denatured alcohol. Rinse with hot water and detergent. Acrylic latex caulk—follow guides lines for removal of latex paint.

*Chewing gum*—Same as caulking, or scrub with naphtha.

*Clay soil*—Scrape off dry material, scrub and rinse with hot water and strong detergent.

*Creosote*—Apply a poultice with paint thinner and talc. Scrub and allow to dry. Scrape off, scrub with scouring powder and rinse with water.

*Leaf, wood rot, or tobacco stains*—apply household bleach and scrub with stiff bristled brush.

*Mortar*—Let harden and carefully remove hardened spots with a trowel, putty knife or chisel.

*Smoke*—Scrub with a poultice of talc with bleach diluted 1:5 with water. Rinse with water.

*Oil or grease that has penetrated*—Mop up any excess oil with rags. Cover the area with oil absorbent (kitty litter). Talc, fuller's earth, diatomaceous earth can be used. Leave it on the stain for a day then sweep up.

*Paint*—Fresh paint should be mopped up immediately with rags or paper towels by blotting. Do not wipe as this will spread the paint and extend the job of removal. If the paint is latex and water based, soak and then scrub the area with hot water, scouring powder and a stiff brush until no more improvement is seen. Let

the remaining paint dry and remove as described below.

*Dried paint*—Scrape any excess oil based paint, varnish or water based latex paint off the surface. Apply a commercial paint remover and let it sit for 20-30 minutes. Loosen with gentle scrubbing. Do not rub the loosened paint into the surface of the paver. Instead, blot up the loosened paint and thinner. Repeat as necessary.

*Tire skid marks*—Scrub black area with water, detergent and scouring powder.

### OVERALL CLEANING

Overall cleaning of the pavement can start after stains are removed. In preparation for cleaning, low tree branches, shrubs and vegetation adjacent to the pavement should be tied back or covered to protect from overspray of cleaning solutions or sealers. The area should be inspected for any cracked or broken units. These should be replaced. Badly stained units can be replaced, but it is usually easier to clean stains and less costly than replacing the pavers.

When pavers have stains too difficult to remove, replace them with the same type of units. Refer to ICPI *Tech Spec 6, Reinstatement of Interlocking Concrete Pavements*, for a full description on replacing pavers. If pavers must be replaced, there may be a difference in color from the surrounding pavers. This variation should eventually disappear. If color variation is unacceptable, controlled use of proprietary cleaners designed to improve the color of concrete pavers can minimize variation.

Removal of accumulated dirt and efflorescence is the objective of cleaning. It is essential in preparing the pavers for sealing as well. Many cleaners effective in removing dirt and efflorescence are a mix of detergent and acid. Cleaners with strong acids will change the color of the pavers slightly. The degree of change can be controlled by the type of acid in the cleaner, its concentration and the length of time on the pavers. Proprietary cleaners will give specific instructions on their application. These directions should be followed. In order to achieve proper results, cleaners should be tried on a small area to test results and any color changes. The concentration and time on the pavement can be adjusted accordingly. Protective clothing and goggles should always be worn when using acidic solutions.

Anticipate where the cleaning fluids will drain, i.e. across the pavement and not onto grass or vegetation. Sediment or cleaners allowed to pond in low spots may stain the pavers. Be sure to rinse these areas thoroughly. Turn off all automatic sprinkler systems during cleaning, sealing and drying.

### Professional Cleaning Methods

For most jobs, cleaning should be handled by a professional company experienced in the use of cleaners and spray equipment. Professionals typically use a pressure washer and an applicator to apply efflorescence cleaner (when needed). The various methods for applying sealers are covered later.

A high pressure sprayer applies cleaner and water between 600 and 2,000 psi (4.1 and 13.8 MPa), and at a rate between 6 and 12 gallons/minute (22 and 45 liters/minute). See Figure 2. The rate of flow is adjusted to ensure sufficient rinsing. The pressure loosens dirt and pushes water from the surface without the need for scrub brushes. The nozzle type and its distance from the paver surface influences the effectiveness of the cleaning as well. A nozzle that

creates a wide spray enables a large area to be covered efficiently and prevents sand from being washed from the joints.

Cleaners to remove efflorescence are applied with a low pressure pump spray 30 to 100 psi (0.2 to 0.7 MPa). A shower type spray nozzle will help ensure even distribution of the cleaner. Cleaning chemicals are applied, allowed to sit an appropriate time, then rinsed away with a high pressure sprayer. The final rinse should be water only.

For small areas, an adequate cleaning job can be achieved without this equipment. Such areas include residential patios, walks, or small driveways. Cleaners can be applied by hand, the pavers scrubbed to remove dirt and efflorescence, then thoroughly rinsed with water from a garden hose. Scrub brushes with steel bristles are not recommended. They will loosen from the brush, rust, and leave stains. Brass or plastic bristles are acceptable. This method of cleaning is for do-it-yourselfers who wish to refurbish a small area of pavers.

The additional time required to clean and seal pavers without the help of a professional should be weighed against investing in a competent company to do the job. Professionals have the equipment and experience with the various chemicals. They can achieve the highest level of results in the least amount of time.

### Efflorescence and Its Removal

Efflorescence is a whitish powder-like deposit which can appear on concrete products. When cement hydrates (hardens after adding water), a significant amount of calcium hydroxide is formed. The calcium hydroxide is soluble in water and migrates by capillary action to the surface of the concrete. A reaction occurs between the calcium hydroxide and carbon dioxide (from the air) to form water insoluble calcium carbonate, then called efflorescence.

Efflorescence does not affect the structural performance or durability of concrete pavers. The reaction which takes place is the formation of water soluble calcium bicarbonate from calcium carbonate, carbon dioxide and water. It may appear immediately or within months following installation. Efflorescence may reach its peak in as short as 60 days after installation. It may remain for months and some of it may wear away. If installation takes place

during dry period of the year, the next cycle of wet weather may sometimes be necessary for efflorescence to materialize.

If there is a need to remove deposits before they wear away, best results can be obtained by using a proprietary efflorescence remover. The acid in proprietary cleaning chemicals are buffered then and blended with other chemicals to provide effective cleaning should without damage to the paver surface. Always refer to the paver supplier or chemical company supplying the chemicals for recommendations on proper dilution and application of chemicals for removal of efflorescence. They are generally applied in sections beginning at the top of slope of the pavement. If the area is large, a sprayer is an efficient means to apply the cleaner. The chemicals are scrubbed on the surface, then rinsed away. Results can be verified after letting the area dry for 24 hours. In most instances one application is sufficient. However, in severe instances of efflorescence, a second application may be necessary. **Note: Protective clothing, chemical resistant rubber boots and gloves, and eye goggles should be worn when applying acid or alkalis.**

### SEALERS

#### Uses

Application of a sealer follows stain removal, efflorescence removal and overall cleaning. Sealers are used for aesthetic and functional reasons. They offer aesthetic improvement by intensifying the paver colors. Some will add a glossy sheen or "wet" look to the pavement (see Figure 3). Other sealers offer some color enhancement and produce a low sheen, or a flat finish.

Sealers offer many functional advantages. They can protect pavers from stain penetration. They are useful around trash receptacles, fast food restaurants, driveways, other areas subject to stains, and where oil drippings are not wanted (see Figure 4). Pavers should not be sealed in areas subject to constant immersion or poor drainage.

Sealers are also useful in stopping unwanted insects, growth of vegetation and weeds. Sealers can stabilize joint sand between pavers cleaned by vacuum sweeping equipment. They can help maintain the sand in the joints under high velocity water flows. Where solvents may be spilled onto pavers, elastomeric urethanes and certain proprietary water based sealers have been successfully used to prevent their penetration. Likewise, these special urethane sealers have been used to stabilize joint sand subject to propeller wash and jet engine exhaust in commercial and military airports (2).

#### Types of Sealers for Concrete Pavers

Table 1 lists the various types of sealer for concrete pavers. The table suggests applications and compares important properties (3). The sealer manufacturer or supplier should be consulted prior to using any sealer to verify that their product will perform in the environment planned for its use. Sealers not recommended for use with pavers are alkyds, esters, and polyvinyl acetates. Epoxies and silicones are generally not used on concrete pavers.

#### Solvent and Water Based Sealers

Sealers can be either solvent or water based. Solvent based sealers consist of solids dissolved in a liquid. Solvent based products carry the dissolved solids as deep as the solvent will penetrate into the concrete paver. After the solvent evaporates, the sealer remains.



Figure 2. Pressurized cleaning equipment used by professional cleaning and sealing companies can bring out the best appearance from pavers.

Water based sealers are emulsions, or very small particles of the sealer dispersed in water. Water based sealers penetrate concrete as far as the size of the particles will permit. After the water evaporates, typically at a slower rate than solvents, the remaining particles bind with the concrete and to each other. These particles cannot penetrate as deeply as those carried by solvents. Water based sealers typically create very little or no gloss on the surface and take more time to cure than solvent based products. Depending on the temperature, wind conditions and humidity, water based sealer curing time will vary.

Some municipalities regulate building materials with high volatile organic contents (VOC's). The restrictions usually apply to solvent based sealers. The VOC level of a sealer refers to the pounds per gallon (or grams per liter) of solvent which evaporates from the sealer, excluding the water. VOC's have been regulated since they can contribute to smog. Most water based sealers comply with VOC restrictions and some solvent

based products may comply as well. Contractors in areas with no VOC regulations tend to use solvent based sealers. The user should check with the sealer supplier to verify VOC compliance in those areas which have restrictions.

Many solvent based products are combustible and emit hazardous fumes. Therefore, flame and sparks should be prevented in the area to be sealed. Persons applying sealers should wear adequate breathing and eye protection. Never use solvent based sealers in poorly ventilated or confined areas.

### Silanes/Siloxanes

Silanes and siloxanes are durable and penetrate concrete well. Silanes are the simpler form that, when exposed to moisture, begin to link up to other silanes. Siloxanes do the same linking together. Both chemicals become a polymer, curing as a film in the capillaries of the concrete. A hydrophobic barrier to moisture is created, preventing moisture from entering but allowing the concrete to "breathe" or release water vapor.

Because silanes and siloxanes reduce moisture from entering the concrete, they can deter efflorescence from appearing on the surface of concrete pavers. They initially enhance colors and produce a flat, no gloss finish on the paver surface. This makes silanes and siloxanes very suitable on exterior areas for resisting efflorescence when a glossy surface is not desired.

Silanes and siloxanes do not resist penetration of petroleum stains unless they have additives specifically for that purpose. When required, proprietary mixtures with additives can increase petroleum stain resistance. Other additives can ensure greater consistency in the color of pavers and avoid a blotchy appearance.

Silanes have smaller molecules, so they penetrate farther into the concrete than larger siloxane molecules. However, they are more volatile (tend to evaporate) until they bond to the concrete paver. Silane sealers generally require a higher percent of solids to counteract their rate of evaporation. Therefore, silanes tend to be more expensive than siloxanes.

Silanes and siloxanes are typically used as water repellents for concrete bridge decks, parking garages, and masonry walls. Their primary use for reinforced concrete structures is to prevent the ingress of chloride ions from de-icing salts(4). This intrusion causes reinforcing steel corrosion in the concrete, and a weakened structure. Their ability to decrease intrusion of chloride materials makes them useful on pavers subject to deicing salts or salt air, such as walks, streets, parking lots, plaza roof and parking decks. They are also useful around pool decks to minimize degradation from chlorine.

Most silane and siloxane sealers are solvent based. Certain manufacturers offer water based products as well. These products may have a very short shelf life after the silane or siloxane has been diluted with water. The user should check with the manufacturer on the useful life of the product.

### Acrylics

Acrylic sealers can be solvent or water based. They enhance paver colors well and create a gloss on the surface. Acrylic sealers provide good stain resistance. Their durability de-



Figure 3. Before and after application of an acrylic sealer shows how it deepens the appearance of concrete pavers.



Figure 4. Sealers resist stains which makes them ideal for high use areas where they might occur.

depends on traffic, the quality of the acrylic and the percentage of solids content. Because solvent based acrylics penetrate better, they provide longer protection from surface wear.

Acrylic sealants are widely used in residential and commercial paver applications. They generally last for a few years in these applications before re-coating is required. Acrylics specifically developed for concrete pavers do not yellow over time. When they become soiled or worn, pavers with acrylics can be easily cleaned and resealed without the use of extremely hazardous materials.

Acrylics should not be used on high abrasion areas such as industrial pavements or floors. Water based acrylics perform well for interior applications. They may be required by municipalities that regulate VOC'S.

### Urethanes

As either solvent or water based, polyurethanes produce a high gloss and enhance the color of pavers. Aromatic urethanes should contain an ultra-violet (UV) inhibitor to reduce yellowing over time. The product label should state that the sealer is UV stable. Urethanes themselves are more resistant to chemicals than acrylics.

While aliphatic urethanes can be used for coating the surface of pavers, elastomeric (aromatic or aliphatic) urethanes should be used where the primary need is to stabilize joint sand. For airfield and gas station applications, the urethane should have a minimum elongation of 100% per ASTM D 2370, Standard Test Method for Tensile Properties of Organic Coatings. Urethanes resist degradation from petroleum based products and de-icing chemicals. This makes them suitable for heavy industrial areas, as well as airfield and gas station pavements.

Urethanes cannot be rejuvenated simply by re-coating. If urethane sealers must be removed, methylene chloride or sand blasting is often used. Methylene chloride is a hazardous chemical, and is not acceptable for flushing into storm drains. It should not be allowed to soak into the soil. Therefore, urethane removal is best handled by professionals.

### SEALING PROCEDURES

All dirt, oil stains and efflorescence must be removed prior to sealing. The cleaned surface must be completely dry prior

to applying most sealers. Allow at least 24 hours without moisture or surface dampness before application. The pavers may draw efflorescence to the surface, or the sealer may whiten, if:

- the surface and joints are not dry,
- they have not had an adequate period of exposure to moisture, or
- if there is a source of efflorescence under the pavers (i.e. in the sand, base, or soil).

If the base under the pavers drains poorly, the sealer is applied to saturated sand in the joints, or is applied too thick, the sealer can become cloudy and diminish the appearance of the pavers. In this situation, the sealer must be removed or redissolved. Consult your sealer supplier for advice on treating this situation.

Cover and protect all surfaces and vegetation around the area to be sealed. For exterior (low-pressure) sprayed applications, the wind should be calm so that it does not cause an uneven application, or blow the sealer onto other surfaces. For many sealers, especially those with high VOC'S, wear protective clothing and mask recommended by the sealer manufacturer to protect the lungs and eyes.

Sealers can be applied with a hand roller if the area is small (under 1000 ft<sup>2</sup> or 93 m<sup>2</sup>). For larger areas, more efficient application methods include a powered roller, or a low pressure sprayer. For early stabilization of joint sand, acrylic or elastomeric urethane sealer is typically applied with a squeegee or foam roller to dry pavers having clean surfaces and chamfers. See Figure 5 and 6.

The liquid urethane is allowed to stand in the chamfers, soaking into the joints. Penetration into the joint sand should be at least 5/8 inch (15 mm). The excess sealer on the surface is pushed to an unsealed area with a rubber squeegee. Squeegees are more effective in achieving good penetration and avoid bringing joint sand to the surface of the pavers. The action of a squeegee wipes most of the sealer from the surface of the pavers while leaving some remaining in the chamfers to eventually soak into the joints. Generally only one coat is required in applications such as those for airports and gas stations.

For other applications, follow the sealer manufacturer's recommendation for application and for the protective gear to be worn during the job. With some sealers that recommend two

**Table 1—Properties of Sealers for Concrete Pavers—Confirm application and properties with supplier.**

	Patios, walks, pool decks	Residential/ Commercial drives	Gas Stations Airports	Areas subject to chlorine & heavy de-icing salts	Finish	Enhances color	Joint sand stabilizer	UV resistant	Can be re-coated	Ease of removal	Price
Silane	Yes	Yes		Yes	Flat	*		Yes	Yes	Mod.	++
Siloxane	Yes	Yes		Yes	Flat	*		Yes	Yes	Diff.	++
Acrylic	Yes	Yes			Gloss	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Diff.	+
Urethane	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Gloss	Yes	Yes	Varies	No	V. Diff.	++

\*Initially, then diminishes. Diff.=Difficult V. Diff.=Very Difficult +=Moderate Price ++=Higher price



Figure 5 (above left) and Figure 6 (above right). Urethane is applied with squeegees to stabilize joint sand between pavers in aircraft pavement and at a gas station.

coats, the first coat is usually applied to saturation. A light second coat, if needed, can be applied for a glossy finish. Be careful not to over apply the sealers such that the surface becomes slippery. For water based sealers requiring two coats, always apply the second coat while the first coat is still very tacky. Prevent all traffic from entering the area until the sealer is completely dry, typically 24 hours.

If spraying sealer on the pavers, care should be taken to prevent the spray nozzle from clogging and causing large droplets to be unevenly distributed on them. This is most important for water based sealers. This can cause a poor appearance and performance.

Sealers normally require reapplication after a period of wear and weather. The period of reapplication will depend on the use, climate, and quality of the sealer.

The U.S. Federal Government and Canadian Government require that all shipments of hazardous materials by common carrier must be accompanied by a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). All chemical manufacturers must supply sheets to shippers, distributors and dealers of cleaners and sealers if the materials are hazardous. The MSDS must accompany all shipments and be available to the purchaser on request. The MSDS lists the

active ingredients, compatibility and incompatibility with other materials, safety precautions and an emergency telephone number if there is a problem in shipping, handling or use. The user should refer to the MSDS for this information.

## REFERENCES

1. Kuenning, W., *Removing Stains from Concrete*, The Aberdeen Group, Addison, Illinois, 1993.
2. Emery, J. A., Stabilization of Jointing Sand in Block Paving, *ASCE Journal of Transportation Engineering*, Vol. 119, No.1 January/February, 1993, American Society of Civil Engineers, New York, pp. 142-148.
3. Thorp, E., "Protection of Concrete with Sealers, Coatings and Membranes," *Concrete Repair Bulletin*, March/April 1993, International Concrete Repair Institute, Sterling, VA, pp. 4 ff.
4. Cady, P.D., "Sealers for Portland Cement Concrete Highway Facilities," *Synthesis of Highway Practice 209*, National Cooperative Highway Research Program, Transportation Research Board, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1994.

Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute  
P.O. Box 1142  
Sterling, VA 20167  
703-450-4998  
Fax: 703-450-0482



In Canada:  
P.O. Box 23053  
55 Ontario St.  
Milton, Ontario L9T 2M0