Technical Bulletin

Issue Date: March 2026

BACKROLLING AND BACKBRUSHING

Spray application is widely used because it provides speed, productivity, and a uniform finish. However, spray application alone is not always enough to achieve the best coating performance on every substrate. On porous, rough, or irregular surfaces, backrolling and backbrushing are often critical follow-up steps that help improve coating penetration, surface contact, adhesion, and overall uniformity.

Although these techniques are sometimes regarded as optional, they can play an important role in both appearance and long-term durability.

Why These Techniques Matter

Backrolling refers to rolling over a freshly sprayed coating while it is still wet. This helps redistribute the material, improve contact with the substrate, and work the coating more effectively into surface irregularities. Backbrushing performs a similar function using a brush rather than a roller and is typically more suitable for rougher or more irregular surfaces where a brush can better work material into joints, voids, grooves, or heavily textured areas. Both techniques are intended to improve the way the coating interacts with the surface rather than simply change its appearance.

On porous or textured substrates, sprayed coatings can sometimes bridge across surface voids rather than fully wetting and penetrating the substrate. When this happens, the coating may leave pinholes, holidays, or weak points in the film. Backrolling or backbrushing helps force the coating into these irregularities, improving continuity of the film and promoting better adhesion.

On CMU, for example, backbrushing or backrolling can help work block filler, or finish coats into mortar joints and porous block surfaces. This can improve block filler performance, reduce the likelihood of missed voids, and help produce a more uniform finish.

On stucco and other textured cementitious surfaces, these methods can help push the coating into recesses and irregular texture patterns that might otherwise receive less material during spray application alone.

On tilt-up or smooth concrete, backrolling can also help improve contact with the surface and may assist in managing variations caused by sacking repairs, patching, or uneven porosity. In these

situations, the goal is not to create texture for its own sake, but to improve wetting, penetration, and uniformity of the applied coating.

Backrolling can also improve the appearance of future touch-ups. A spray-only application often leaves a very smooth and visually uniform film. While that may initially look desirable, it can make later roller or brush touch-ups stand out more clearly.

When a coating is backrolled immediately after spraying, it develops a more consistent "micro-texture." This slightly less uniform surface can be more forgiving when touch-up work is required later, helping reduce the visual contrast between the original application and the repaired area.

Special Considerations

Not every project requires backrolling or backbrushing. On smooth, properly sealed drywall, metal, or other dense and uniform substrates, spray-only application will often provide acceptable results. In these cases, the surface may not benefit significantly from additional working of the coating.

The decision should be based on the specific substrate, its porosity, its texture, and the performance requirements of the coating system rather than treating backrolling or backbrushing as automatic steps on every project.

Timing is critical for both backrolling and backbrushing. These techniques must be performed while the coating remains wet and workable. If too much time passes, the coating may begin to set, and working it further can cause dragging, lap marks, or disruption of the surface texture. Proper coordination between the spray applicator and the person backrolling or backbrushing is important to maintain a wet edge and avoid defects.

Contractors must also pay attention to film thickness. While backrolling and backbrushing can improve coating penetration and distribution, overly aggressive working of the coating can reduce film build below specified levels if not properly managed.

The goal is to improve surface contact and uniformity without overworking the material or pulling too much product away from the surface.

Key Takeaways

Backrolling and backbrushing are not merely aesthetic techniques. When used appropriately, they are important performance-enhancing practices that can improve coating penetration, adhesion, continuity, and appearance on porous or textured substrates.

Understanding when these methods are necessary, and when they are not, helps contractors choose the appropriate application approach for the substrate and service conditions. When used at the right time and applied with proper technique, backrolling and backbrushing can significantly improve finish quality and contribute to long-term coating durability.