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## CARE & MAINTENANCE OF EXTERIOR COATINGS

Exterior coatings are designed to protect substrates from weathering, moisture intrusion, and ultraviolet (UV) degradation while maintaining long-term appearance. However, all exterior coatings are exposed to environmental stressors that gradually affect performance. A structured maintenance program—including routine inspection, cleaning, and early remediation—helps extend service life, preserve aesthetics, and reduce lifecycle costs.

### Periodic Inspection and Early Remediation

Exterior coatings should be visually inspected at least annually, and more frequently in harsh environments. Early detection of minor issues—such as hairline cracking, joint sealant failure, coating erosion, mildew growth, or localized peeling—allows corrective action before substrate damage occurs. As the saying goes, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”—routine inspections and small, timely repairs are typically far less disruptive and far less costly than addressing widespread coating failure or substrate deterioration later.

As part of routine maintenance, cracks, joints, penetrations, and other openings should be carefully evaluated to ensure they are properly sealed. Failed or deteriorated sealant joints can allow water intrusion behind the coating system, leading to blistering, peeling, substrate deterioration, or corrosion. Any open gaps, split sealant, or voids should be cleaned and resealed with a compatible, high-quality sealant designed for the specific substrate and movement conditions. Maintaining the integrity of joints and transitions is critical to preventing moisture-related coating failure.

### South-Facing Elevations: UV Exposure

South- and west-facing elevations typically receive the most direct and prolonged UV exposure. Intense sunlight accelerates binder degradation, leading to chalking, color fade, and surface erosion over time. Darker colors are particularly susceptible to noticeable fading and thermal stress.

On these elevations, assess the surface for chalking, color fade or gloss loss, micro-cracking, early film erosion, joint sealant shrinkage, and other visible defects. Early corrective action may include targeted cleaning, sealant repairs, and spot-priming prior to recoating. Prompt attention to localized issues helps limit moisture entry and reduces the risk of broader coating failure.

### North-Facing Elevations: Mold and Mildew

North-facing surfaces and shaded areas stay damp longer, creating conditions that support mildew and algae formation. These organisms do not originate from the coating itself; they come from airborne particles in the surrounding environment that settle on damp surfaces and begin to grow.

If mildew is suspected, spot-test with diluted household bleach (3:1 mixture of water to household bleach). If the staining lightens, biological growth is likely present. Remove mildew before repainting and never paint over it. Typical remediation includes washing with a mildew cleaner, allowing adequate dwell time, rinsing thoroughly, and letting the surface dry completely before coating application.

Ensuring proper drainage, keeping vegetation trimmed back, and directing irrigation away from painted surfaces can help minimize recurrence.

## Cleaning and Power Washing

Routine cleaning helps remove dirt, airborne pollutants, and chalking residue, which supports both appearance retention and longer coating service life. Allow newly applied coatings to dry for at least two weeks before washing. Power washing can be effective for removing embedded soil, chalk, and other surface contaminants, but pressure must be carefully controlled to avoid damaging the paint film, driving water behind cladding, or compromising sealant joints. Use a wide fan tip and maintain adequate distance from the surface to reduce the risk of damage (Figure 1).



Figure 1

## Coastal Environments and Salt Contamination

In coastal environments, exterior painted surfaces are exposed to salt-laden air. Salt deposits can accumulate on the coating, attract moisture, and accelerate deterioration—especially on metal substrates where corrosion risk is higher. In these environments, increase wash frequency (typically twice per year) to remove salt deposits, inspect metal components for early corrosion, and promptly repair coating defects to reduce rust creep and premature failure.

## Maintenance Planning and Documentation

A systematic exterior maintenance plan is recommended for projects, particularly commercial and institutional applications, where long-term appearance and performance are critical. The plan should define how often surfaces will be evaluated (at least annually), establish cleaning intervals based on exposure and site conditions, and include focused checks for UV-related wear on south- and west-facing elevations, mildew risk on shaded or north-facing areas, and salt-removal procedures in coastal environments when applicable. Keeping records of inspections, cleaning, and repairs also supports warranty documentation and long-term maintenance planning.

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