



## THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIMERS IN COATING SYSTEMS

Primers play a critical role in the overall performance of a coating system. While finish coats provide color, sheen, and surface durability, primers are specifically formulated to promote adhesion, seal porous surfaces, improve uniformity, and enhance long-term performance. Skipping or substituting the appropriate primer can compromise the entire coating system, particularly on challenging substrates or in exterior exposure conditions.

Primers are engineered with resin systems, pigments, and additives designed to interact directly with the substrate. They are formulated to penetrate porous surfaces, anchor to dense or glossy materials, block stains, resist alkali, and provide a stable, uniform base for subsequent topcoats. In many cases, primers address substrate-specific challenges that finish coats are not designed to overcome.

### Understanding “Paint & Primer” Products

Products marketed as “paint & primer” (formerly known as Paint & Prime in One) have become common in the marketplace. These paints are formulated to provide improved hiding compared to traditional topcoats. This is largely driven by rheology, which is how a coating flows and holds its body during application, allowing it to lay down a thicker film when applied by brush or roller. While they may possess certain primer-like properties such as enhanced opacity and adhesion, they are not equivalent to a true substrate-specific primer used in combination with a topcoat.



These products are primarily designed to function as finish coats and are not engineered to solve more complex adhesion, staining, moisture, corrosion, or substrate-related issues. Their performance benefits are generally related to hiding and film build rather than addressing the underlying condition of the substrate.

### Where Paint & Primer Products May Be Appropriate

Paint & primer products can be effective for repainting surfaces that are already coated and in good condition. They are best suited for sound, previously painted surfaces that are well-adhered and free of surface contaminants, where the goal is mainly color change and hiding rather than addressing a substrate issue. In these low-risk situations, a quality conventional topcoat that isn't marketed as “paint & primer” will often perform similarly because the existing, well-bonded coating is already serving as the primer layer. Even so, proper surface preparation remains essential, including cleaning, removing contaminants, and deglossing as needed to promote adhesion.

It is also important to recognize that paint & primer products still require proper film build to perform as intended. In most cases, this means applying at least two coats. A single coat of a paint & primer

product rarely provides enough hide, film thickness, or durability, especially with major color changes. Even when one coat appears to cover, it typically won't match the durability and performance you get from applying two full finish coats.

## When a Dedicated Primer Is Recommended

When painting bare substrates, repaired areas, or surfaces with known challenges, a dedicated primer is strongly recommended. Substrate-specific primers are designed to address the particular characteristics and risks associated with different materials.

For example, wood primers are formulated to penetrate and lock down wood fibers while helping control tannin bleed. Masonry primers are often designed to tolerate elevated pH levels and reduce the risk of efflorescence-related issues. Metal primers frequently contain corrosion-inhibitive pigments or adhesion promoters designed for steel, galvanized metal, or aluminum.

These are specialized performance functions that paint-and-primer products are not designed to replace.

## The Importance of Priming for Exterior Applications

Exterior applications place even greater importance on proper priming. Exterior substrates are subjected to moisture cycling, temperature fluctuations, UV-exposure, and environmental contaminants. These conditions can place significant stress on the coating system.

Substrate-specific exterior primers are formulated to address these stressors and help prevent common failure modes such as peeling, corrosion, staining, blistering, and moisture intrusion (Figure 1). Using the correct primer improves adhesion, reduces moisture-related risks, and supports long-term coating durability, especially on new or weathered substrates.

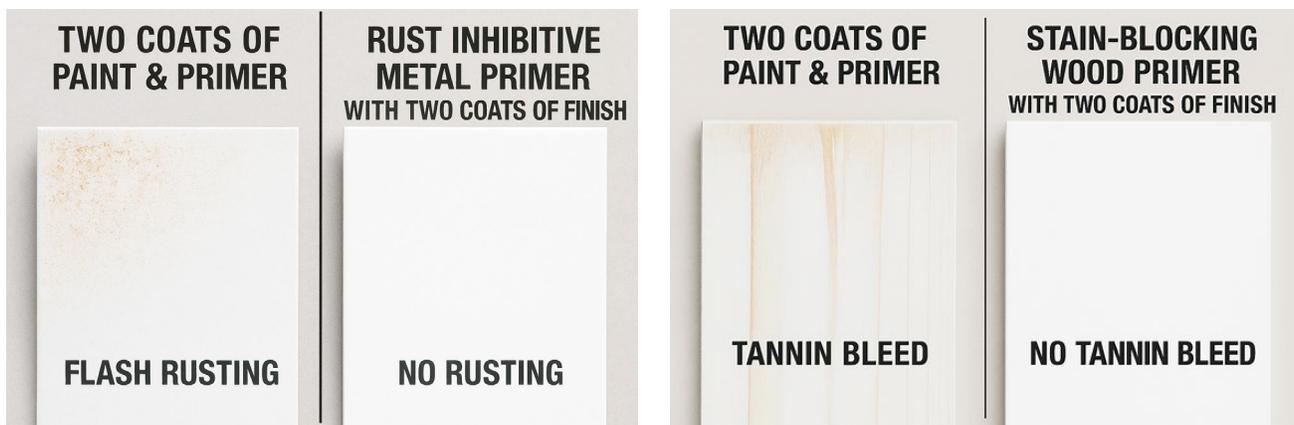


Figure 1

## Primers Improve Compatibility, Appearance, and Cost Efficiency

In addition to improving adhesion, primers create a controlled interface between the substrate and the finish coat, which improves system compatibility and helps ensure the topcoat cures and performs as intended. Primers also promote a more uniform finish by equalizing porosity and absorption across the

surface, reducing flashing, patch read-through, and uneven sheen that can occur when finish coats are applied directly over repairs or mixed-porosity areas. Using a separate primer can also provide cost savings, since finish coats, especially high-quality paints, are typically more expensive than primers. A dedicated primer helps seal and prepare the surface with a lower-cost layer, which can improve coverage, reduce the number of finish coats needed to achieve a uniform appearance, and minimize rework tied to adhesion problems, flashing, or stain bleed-through.

## Key Takeaways

Paint & primer products can perform well when recoating sound, previously painted surfaces that do not present substrate specific challenges and are located in relatively low risk service conditions. However, they should not be viewed as a replacement for a complete coating system consisting of a surface appropriate primer followed by two finish coats, especially for exterior exposures or when coating bare, repaired, stained, glossy, porous, or otherwise challenging substrates.

For best results, the surface should be evaluated carefully and the primer selected based on the specific substrate characteristics and service demands. When properly matched to the substrate and environment, primers improve adhesion, promote a more uniform appearance, enhance durability, and provide a more reliable foundation for long term coating performance.

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