



AGS INC

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Architectural Grilles & Sunshades, Inc.

CARE AFTER INSTALLATION OF ANODIZED ALUMINUM

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Architectural Aluminum Manufacturers Association, recognizing the need for the aluminum industry to provide information on the care and maintenance of exterior wall finishes, released a publication entitled “Voluntary Guide Specification for Cleaning and Maintenance of Architectural Anodized Aluminum, AAMA 609.1-1977.” This specification outlines methods, equipment, and materials to clean anodized aluminum after construction and for subsequent, periodic maintenance. The methods outlined are applicable to architectural products fabricated from both rolled and extruded shapes, including window and door frames, store fronts, and entrances, curtain walls, mullions, hand rails, flag poles, and hardware. The information provided in the specification is useful to building owners, managers, architects, contractors, and others in the building industry that are interested in the proper care and maintenance of anodized aluminum.

As with any finished building material, aluminum requires reasonable care prior to and during installation and periodic cleaning and maintenance after installation. Although anodized aluminum is exceptionally resistant, to corrosion, discoloration and wear, its natural beauty can be marred by harsh chemicals, abuse or neglect. Such conditions usually affect only the surface finish but do not reduce the service life of the aluminum. All exterior surfaces collect varying amounts of soil and dirt, depending on geographic area, environmental conditions, finish and location on the building. These factors and the owner’s attitude regarding surface appearance determine the type and frequency of cleaning required. The aluminum cleaning schedule should be integrated with other cleaning schedules for efficiency and economy. For example, both the glass and the aluminum curtain wall can be cleaned at the same time.

Cleaning may be required more often in one geographic area than another when appearance is of prime importance. More frequent cleaning will be required in heavy industrialized areas than in rural areas. Seasonal rainfall can affect washing frequency by removing water-soluble deposits and less adherent soil. In foggy coastal regions, frequent cycles of condensation and drying can create a heavy buildup of atmospheric salts and dirt, which may adhere tenaciously. In climates where the rainfall is low, the opportunity for atmospheric washing of the surface is minimal. Los Angeles, for example, with its unique combination of limited rainfall, temperature fluctuation, smog and condensation, requires that aluminum be cleaned more frequently than in other metropolitan areas with more frequent rainfall.

In both wet and dry climates, recessed and sheltered areas usually become more heavily soiled because of the lack of rain-washing. More frequent and longer periods of condensation also occur in protected areas, increasing the adhesion of the soil.



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This is particularly true of soffit areas on overhangs, bottoms of fascia panels, sheltered column covers and the like. Periodic maintenance inhibits long-term accumulation of soil, which, under certain conditions, can accelerate weathering of the finish.

CLEANING PROCEDURES

Cleaning procedures for aluminum should be initiated as soon as practical after completion of installation to remove construction soils and accumulated environmental soils and discolorations.

Cleaning work should start at the top of the building and proceed to the ground level in a continuous drop. Using a forceful water spray, an area the width of the stage or scaffolding should be rinsed as cleaning proceeds from the top down.

Because surface soils may be light or heavy, several progressively stronger cleaning procedures may be employed depending of the severity and tenacity of the soil. Only trial and simplest procedure to remove the soil is the one that should be used.

For light soils, the simplest procedure is to flush the surface with water using moderate pressure. If soil is still present after air-drying the surface, scrubbing with a brush or sponge and concurrent spraying with water should be tried. If soils still adhere, than a mild detergent cleaner should be used with brushing or sponging. Washing should be done with uniform pressure, first horizontally then vertically. Following the washing the surfaces must be thoroughly rinsed by spraying with clean water.

If it is necessary to remove oil, wax, polish, or other similar materials, MEK or an equivalent solvent is recommended for clean up. Extreme care must be exercised when solvents of this type are used since they may damage organic sealants, gaskets and finishes. These solvents should never be used on anodic finishes protected by clear organic coatings unless the organic coating has deteriorated and should be removed.

Removing heavy surface soils may require the use of an abrasive cleaning pad. In this procedure the pad is thoroughly soaked with clean water or a mild detergent cleaner and the metal surface is hand scrubbed with uniform pressure. Scrubbing action should be in the direction of the metal grain. Scrubbing with a nylon-cleaning pad impregnated with a surface protectant material is also recommended for removing stubborn soils and stains. After scrubbing, the surface should be rinsed thoroughly with clean water to remove all residues.

In some circumstances it may be desirable to wipe the surface with a solvent. The surface is then permitted to air dry or is wiped dry with a chamois, squeegee or lint-free cloth.

Using power-cleaning tools may be necessary to remove unusually heavy soils from large areas including panels and column covers. When using such tools, the surface must be continually flushed with clean water or a mild detergent cleaning solution to provide lubrication and a medium for carrying away the dirt. After an area has been machine scrubbed, it must be rinsed with clean water and thoroughly scrubbed with a fairly stiff bristle brush. The surface may then be air dried or wiped dry.



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INSPECTION

It is suggested that the building owner or manager provide an engineer or other qualified representative to inspect the cleaning work. Care must be taken to see that metal seams, crevices, sills and other areas that may trap water, cleaner, or dirt are carefully cleaned and dried. A final inspection to ensure that no discoloration or stains remain on the surface is recommended.

CLEANING PRECAUTIONS

Certain precautions must be taken when cleaning anodized aluminum surfaces. Aluminum finishes must first be identified to select the appropriate cleaning method. Aggressive alkaline or acid cleaners must never be used. Cleaning hot, sun-heated surfaces should be avoided since possible chemical reactions will be highly accelerated and cleaning non-uniformity could occur. Strong organic solvents, while not affecting anodized aluminum, may extract stain-producing chemicals from sealants and may affect the function of the sealants. Strong cleaners should not be used on window glass and other components where it is possible for the cleaner to come in contact with the aluminum. Excessive abrasive rubbing should not be used since it could damage the finish.

FIELD PROTECTION AND MAINTENANCE

Field protection and maintenance of cleaned surfaces is of particular interest. A wipe-on surface protectant is now available which is estimated to provide protection for 12 to 24 months in the harshest environments. This protectant is applied to a thoroughly cleaned and dried anodized surface with a lint-free cloth or felt pad. The benefits of such an application are two-fold; first, it protects the finish, and second, it makes subsequent maintenance easier. Subsequent maintenance may well be reduced to simply flushing the surface with water, permitting it to dry and wiping on a surface protectant every few years. In applying this protectant it is very important that the manufacturer's recommendations be carefully followed.

Many waxes are available for application to anodized finishes, but they are best used on interior items such as handrails, doors, and decorative metals. It is generally not practical to use these materials on high-rise portions of a building.

EQUIPMENT AND PRODUCTS

Equipment and products needed for cleaning and maintaining anodized aluminum finishes are listed in Section 7 of AAMA 609.1-1977. These include mild soaps, detergents, non-etching cleaners, abrasive cleaning pads and cleaning machines. AAMA, however, has not evaluated these materials nor does its listing constitute an endorsement. This list is included only as an aid to potential users in identifying the materials.