

By making the sealing choice before the driveway is installed, you can then inform your contractor on the curing method that you would prefer.

Maintaining Your New Concrete

You wouldn't use a strong caustic soap to clean your new carpet. Nor would you use acid to clean your new kitchen or bathroom fixtures. In fact, you're pretty careful about how you clean and take care of your new home inside. But, what about outside concrete walks, drives, patios, porches and steps? Give the new exposed concrete around your house the same consideration as your pretty new interior! It's quality concrete, but don't abuse it.



New concrete should be at least three months old before deicing chemicals - those that contain sodium chloride (common salt) or calcium chloride - are used. Remember, deicing salts are not recommended in the first winter. The only safe material to use to make the concrete surface skid resistant during the first winter is plain sand. Promptly remove any deicers tracked onto or inadvertently broadcast on new concrete.

It is helpful that a recommended surface sealer be applied in the fall prior to the concrete's first winter. Check with your builder, contractor or ready mix supplier for recommended quality concrete sealers and refer to the next section on choosing sealers. These can be rolled or sprayed on and do require re-application for continued performance.

Never use deicers containing ammonium sulfate or ammonium nitrate. These prod-

ucts are commercial fertilizers used by farmers and have on occasion been packaged and sold as deicers. They will effectively melt snow and ice, BUT they will also rapidly disintegrate concrete. Also, deicers containing magnesium or acetate are also known to be harmful to concrete and should be avoided.

Clear snow and ice, including deicers, from your concrete surfaces as soon as possible.

Sealing Concrete - Ongoing Protection

Just as you paint the trim on your home or wax your car to keep them looking nice and protect their base structures from detrimental elements, you should seal your concrete regularly to protect it from moisture penetration and prolong its life too. Although it seems ironic, it is true that when concrete is first placed, we want to keep the moisture in; once it has matured, we want to keep moisture out. This is especially true for concrete that will be subjected to freezing and thawing. You can do this by maintaining your concrete with a sealer designed to keep out water and deicing chemicals.

Choosing a Sealer

Choosing a product to seal your concrete can seem like a complicated process, but let's try to cut through it all to some simple choices. There are really only two types of concrete sealers - those that form a film on the surface of your concrete, giving it a wet look, and those that are designed to penetrate the concrete leaving it dry looking, yet water repellent. Like any choice, each has its advantages and disadvantages.

THE 'WET LOOK' VS. THE 'DRY LOOK'

Wet Look - Film Formers

Advantages

- tend to be less costly
- better stain protection (i.e., oil, grease, etc.)
- usually compatible with curing method used
- glossy to medium gloss look
- deepens and highlights the color of exposed aggregate, colored or stamped concrete

Disadvantages

- can darken the concrete
- may appear blotchy if not evenly applied
- will wear away, requiring more frequent applications
- may create a slippery surface

Dry Look - Penetrating Sealers

- should not change the concrete's appearance
- less frequent applications needed
- easy to apply

- usually more costly
- not as effective as a stain protector
- cannot be applied over a film forming compound

Film Formers - 'Wet Look'

The film formers are usually made from acrylic compounds. They form a thin coating on the surface of your concrete, leaving a wet look; much like varnish does on wood. These products generally tend to be less expensive on a per gallon basis than their penetrating counterparts, but you'll probably find that they will need more frequent application since they will weather and wear away more quickly.

One significant advantage of the film formers is that there is usually not a compatibility concern with the method of curing used or whatever previous sealer might have been applied.

The biggest problem that can develop with the film formers is that they tend to darken the color of your concrete. This may not be a problem on decorative concrete where a deeper color is desired, but on plain concrete the color variation may be objectionable. Just like varnish will enrich the color of wood, these will do the same to concrete. And just like it may take several coats of varnish to provide an even, rich color, don't expect the film forming concrete sealer to perform differently. If after one coat you get some dark areas and some light, you may want to apply another coat to make it evenly dark. These initial variations in color may be caused by natural variances in the porosity of the concrete and/or uneven application, but they are quite normal.