

Smart Words for Smart Homeowners

THE EXPERIENCE OF EXPERTS AND THEIR ADVICE ON RELEVANT HOMEOWNER TOPICS

Garage Floor Concrete Cleaners & Degreasers

Overview

In order to prepare a concrete floor for paint or epoxy it must be clean. This is a briefing on the many products to accomplish this task.

A wide assortment of degreaser & cleaners are available. Each is designed to clean or remove specific contamination from concrete. Understanding what these different cleaners do & how they work can save you time & money. They are not all alike.

How A Basic Soap Works

We all know that oil & water do not mix. Soap consists of fatty acids that emulsify oil, grease & dirt, allowing the particles to be removed with a water-based solution. Without soap, just plain water doesn't have much cleaning ability. By surrounding & entrapping stubborn oil (& organic-based dirt) a soap or cleaner allows the grime to be rinsed away more easily.

Concrete

Concrete is porous, holds dirt, shows only some road tar & lubricants on its surface & will hide most penetrated anti freeze. Concrete will also absorb road salt that drip from your car. Concrete is a tough surface to clean 100%. Doing some research & trying a few different systems can really pay off. Once you find the cleaner that really works for each specific task, use it. But don't expect it to work perfectly for other specific tasks.

PH-Neutral Cleaners

These are mild cleaners. They are designed for cleaning interior sealed concrete surfaces that do not have imbedded dirt. They can also be used on exterior or interior unsealed concrete that only needs a mild cleaning.

Acidic Cleaners

These cleaners are primarily designed to remove stains, dirt & contamination that are soluble in an acidic solution. They are especially effective for removing efflorescence - the white powder - an insoluble metallic salt that will not wash away in plain water. Any material containing portland cement can result in efflorescence. The most usual reaction occurs when calcium hydroxide (lime) forms in the hydration reaction

of portland cement. Efflorescence is caused when soluble salts & other water dispersible materials leach to the surface of concrete & mortar. It is especially prevalent near swimming pools because of the evaporating chlorine & lime mating. Exposure to hard water, chlorine from a pool, a high salt content in the concrete & high soil alkalinity are common causes of these stains.

Acidic cleaners contain acid as the active ingredient. Most times, agitation is needed & stubborn stains may need additional applications. It is critical to neutralize the concrete after acid cleaning followed by a clean-water rinse. It is smart to use a sealer to protect the area from future alkaline or salt contamination.

Diluting standard Muriatic Acid is a widely used & accepted type of acidic cleaner. It is important to note that over-the-counter cleaners like Lime Away & soap-scum removers are designed to clean similar types of contamination in a bathroom environment, but do not contain acid so they may not be as effective on concrete.

Alkaline Cleaners

Also known as "concrete degreasers," alkaline cleaners are most often used to eradicate oil, grease or other hydrocarbon-based stains in concrete. The high alkalinity of these cleaners emulsifies (breaks down) oily contamination. The other application for alkaline cleaners is to neutralize concrete surfaces after acid staining or acid cleaning. Alkaline cleaners are the best way to bring the pH of concrete from acidic to alkaline. Concrete's natural state is Alkaline. Modern alkaline soaps & cleaners far exceed the neutralizing ability of the old-school method of baking soda. They are economical too. 1 gallon of cleaner fully diluted will treat approximately 4,000 square feet of concrete.

Alkaline cleaners typically come as concentrates. Apply the cleaner full strength for deep or older stains & dilute it for newer stains that haven't penetrated far. Agitation or scrubbing to work the cleaner into the oil stain is critical for good results. A common mistake when using alkaline cleaners



is to not allow enough time for the cleaner to work. Depending on the type & depth of the oil stain, multiple applications may be necessary, with each being allowed to work for a few hours to get acceptable results.



Enzymatic & Bacterial Active Cleaners

When to use them: The newest types of concrete cleaners are those that use organic chemistry & active enzymes to attack, break down & in some cases digest stains & contamination. They are also known as "oxidation cleaners," with the most popular brand being OxiClean. Generally, they are formulated to break down very specific soils, such as starch-based stains, hydrocarbon-based stains & protein based stains. For example, eliminating pet urine stains on concrete is a common problem. Using an enzyme cleaner that targets protein is the best way to remove these types of stains. Both odor & stain from urine is mostly protein.

The other type of active cleaner is bacterial. These cleaners use genetically engineered bacteria that actually feed on oil, grease; hydrocarbons.

A major benefit to using these types of cleaners is that most do not require water for activation & there is little or no residue to wash away. The enzyme or bacteria simply consumes the contamination until it's gone. The biggest drawback is that they require time to work. Depending on the size of the contamination or stain, the enzyme or bacteria may require days or weeks to do its job. Most of these types of cleaners are applied directly to the stain with little or no agitation required. For large or stubborn stains repeat applications are required.

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