

Media Blasting Versus Chemical Stripping

Which is the best way to remove an existing finish, media blasting or chemical stripping? Like most questions of this nature there is no definitive answer, it depends on the situation. Both methods of removing a finish have their positive and negative attributes. The results will depend on the competence of the person or persons doing the work as well as the method used. For the sake of comparison, we will look at the features of each method to help you make a more informed decision about which one to choose.

Media Blasting

Although media blasting can be accomplished by a homeowner, it requires the rental of an industrial size air compressor and a Blaster Buddy unit. Media blasting not only removes the existing finish, but it also removes the top layer of wood. Media blasting can be a very aggressive procedure. In the hands of someone inexperienced with media blasting, extensive damage can be done to the surface of the wood in a very short span of time. That is why media blasting is best left to professionals who have prior experience. After media blasting, it is recommended that the walls be cleaned with a Log Wash™ solution (1 cups per gallon of clean water) to remove debris.

In general we take the position that media blasting should be considered carefully and evaluated as a secondary method rather than the preferred method of removing an existing finish. We have received calls from homeowners who are disappointed after seeing what media blasting did to their log home. They call us wanting to know what they can do to restore the logs to their original smooth surface. Unfortunately, the only way to restore the surface is labor intensive hand sanding. Media blasting followed by Osborn brushing can result in a relatively smooth surface if done by a well-trained and experienced individual. However, this is more the exception than the rule.

Some Advantages of Media Blasting

- Does an excellent job removing most paints and stains.
- Fairly quick and cost effective.
- Avoids water getting into the home, but dry dust and blasting media may penetrate into the interior of the home.
- Since the blasting media consists of either recycled crushed glass or organic materials like corncob grit or walnut shells there is little chance of environmental contamination.

Disadvantages of Media Blasting

- Media blasting changes the surface characteristics of the wood by roughening the surface.
- Many people consider a media blasted surface unattractive and the only way to restore the wood to a smooth surface is with time consuming hand sanding.
- Prelude should always be used as a primer on media blasted surfaces.
- Having enough blasting media on hand is critical. You do not want to run out in the middle of a wall since it may take two or three days to have additional material shipped to your location

Chemical Stripping

Chemical stripping refers to the use of finish removers used in conjunction with a pressure washer. Chemical strippers only soften an existing finish, they must be used along with a pressure washer to remove the finish from the wall. In contrast to media blasting, chemical stripping is much more user friendly. All that is required are a general-purpose pressure washer, available at most do-it-yourself outlets or equipment rental locations, and either our S-100 or Striplt® Finish Remover. A pressure washer is much easier to handle than media blasting equipment. Although aggressive pressure washing can still do surface damage, it is usually relatively easy to repair with a light sanding or an Osborn Buffing Brush.

The main advantage of chemical stripping is that when following the proper procedures, the result is a beautiful smooth clean surface. So why do some stain manufacturers recommend media blasting over pressure washing? Media blasting significantly increases the surface area and porosity of the surface resulting in better adhesion of an inferior product. However, media blasting may result in an unattractive finish.

Some Advantages of Chemical Stripping

- Does an excellent job when procedures are followed.
- User friendly. Takes little expertise and no specialized equipment is required.
- One wall at a time can be refinished.
- Results in a more attractive surface.

Disadvantages of Chemical Stripping

- Water may get into the home.
- Need to protect plants and shrubs from chemicals.
- May take more than one application to completely remove an existing finish.
- Must thoroughly rinse any applied chemicals before applying a finish.



Examples of Media Blasted Surfaces



Stained Blasted Surface
Without Prelude

Stained Blasted Surface
Primed with Prelude