

Addressing Graffiti on Historic Masonry

The American Easement Foundation

Overview

One of the most prevalent abuses of historic properties is graffiti. The American Easement Foundation recognizes the gravity of the problem and offers this discussion to facilitate basic maintenance activities. Preservationists generally agree that prompt removal of graffiti will help to discourage further abuses. The preferred treatment is removal with the gentlest methods possible. A low pressure wash, with water and detergent is typically a first step. If that is not effective, then using an appropriate chemical cleaner may be considered.

AEF's easement documents prescribe standards when maintenance operations, such as graffiti removal will be undertaken. The overarching standard is the Secretary of the Interior's Standard for Rehabilitation, which can be read at this address:

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/stand.htm>

In turn, there is technical guidance offered by the National Park Service that addresses proper methodologies for graffiti removal and acceptable ways to minimize future damage. These can be read at this website:

<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/masonry01.htm>

Best Practices

The guidance offered through the Technical Preservation Services of the Secretary of the Interior includes recommended cleaning methods that are appropriate for the removal of graffiti. Their recommendations are selected from the section "BUILDING EXTERIOR MASONRY" and the methodologies are derived from them.



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Before you begin:

Owners of properties for which AEF holds easements must secure approval prior to initiating the work. A description of the scope of the work and the products, test results, and application methods is required to receive a permit to initiate the work. In addition, there may be local authorities such as building departments and local historic review boards whose approval may be required prior to the initiation of any work.



STEPS IN REMOVING GRAFFITI

While many methods can be employed to correctly remove graffiti, the following steps are commonly employed.

Step 1: Determine the type of masonry

The initial step should be an analysis of the composition or type of the masonry. Because stone, as well as all masonry materials, vary in chemical composition some manufacturers of chemical cleaners have designed particular products to correspond to the masonry's chemical composition.



Step 2: Select a cleaning method

Once the composition of the stone or the type of masonry is known and the finish considered, a cleaner can be selected and the removal method determined. Commonly, the supplier's FAQ section or chat box contains information appropriate to these decisions. Selection of the removal product and equipment should be done in consultation with the manufacturer's or product distributor's representative.

Step 3: Secure permits and approvals

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Step 4: Conduct a field test

In most removal efforts, field testing of the product and process should occur to determine the effect of the cleaner over time. This will assure minimal damage to the historic material and its surface appearance.



Step 5: Use qualified professionals

The removal of graffiti should be performed by technicians familiar with the manufacturer's cleaner and removal equipment. All work should be performed adhering to the manufacturer's application recommendations.

Step 6: Consider a protective coating

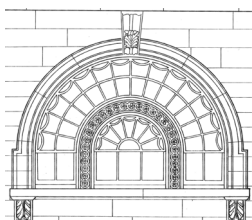
Once the area is cleaned and stabilized, the decision to apply anti-graffiti coatings can be made. In certain instances, it may be prudent to coat the masonry with a protective surfacing to minimize future graffiti damage.

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards provide this guidance related to protective coating:

RECOMMENDED

NOT RECOMMENDED

Applying non-historic surface treatments, such as water-repellent coatings, to masonry only after repointing and only if masonry repairs have failed to arrest water penetration problems.	Applying waterproof, water-repellent, or non-original historical coatings (such as stucco) to masonry as a substitute for repointing and masonry repairs.
Applying permeable, anti-graffiti coatings to masonry when appropriate.	Applying water-repellent or anti-graffiti coatings that change the appearance of the masonry or that may trap moisture if the coating is not sufficiently permeable.



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For more information about the AEF and for other technical assistance, go to:
AmericanEasement.org