

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Painting vs. Fog Coating

What is Fog Coating?

Many homes and communities in the Southwest are constructed using color coated stucco as an exterior finish. This type of construction is a lower cost alternative to painting, which helps to minimize construction costs. Stucco manufacturers are promoting a “fog coat” rather than painting over aged, unpainted stucco. Fog coating amounts to an application of a pigmented, bonding cement coating over the existing stucco. An advantage of this approach is that it is a relatively inexpensive process. However, because stucco is a porous, cement based system, it is susceptible to fade, mildew, moisture, cracking, and general degradation if not properly protected.

How does moisture affect stucco?

Stucco is a breathable, porous substrate that allows liquid moisture to readily absorb from the outside while allowing moisture vapor to escape from the inside. If the building is properly constructed, and there are no structural defects that prevent vapor or liquid moisture from easily escaping, fog coating is an economical alternative. Weep screeds at the base of all exterior walls are the drainage mechanism that allows moisture to wick down through the stucco and out the base of the exterior wall. Unfortunately, many short-cuts take place in stucco construction practices, especially concerning the drainage installation. When the job is less than perfect and drainage is impaired, liquid moisture cannot effectively drain out of the stucco. During periods of rain, when moisture is absorbed into the stucco, it brings dirt and other nutrients into the stucco, which can discolor the surface and promote mildew growth. If there is not adequate drainage, these contaminants will contribute to stucco discoloration, mildew growth, and

overall stucco degradation. Additionally, because stucco is a cement based material, the limes and other salts that are part of the mix can leave white, fuzzy deposits on the surface. This phenomenon is called efflorescence, and if left untreated, these lime deposits can spread and eventually deteriorate the stucco, requiring more expensive repairs.

Why paint stucco?

In order to protect and prolong the life of exterior stucco surfaces, a quality acrylic paint should be applied. Painting is a preferred system particularly when the stucco is less than perfect, or it is unknown how well it sheds water. A quality acrylic paint is better able to prevent liquid moisture from penetrating into the substrate, while still allowing moisture vapor to pass through from the inside. This will keep the walls drier, and less prone to mold and mildew problems during the lifespan. The exterior surface will be sealed, which does not allow dirt and other nutrients to discolor the stucco or cause mildew. Top quality acrylic paints also provide other benefits which include:

- Bridging of hairline cracks to resist moisture intrusion
- Improving the aesthetics of the structure
- Increased protection against damaging environmental conditions (UV, wind, and rain)
- Greater variety of color choices when considering a re-fresh

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