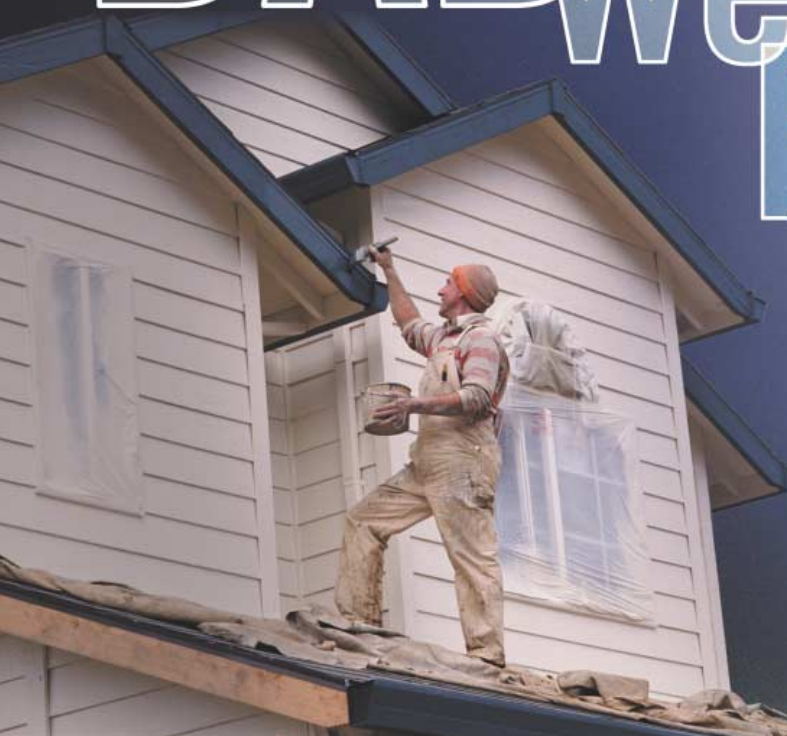


BAD Weather Painting



Painting is about quality finishes, but it is also about making money. And you can't make money if the conditions won't let you work.

By Don Proctor

Any pro painter with a conscience won't go out of his or her way to paint outdoors when Mother Nature is up to no good. But there are times when bad weather gets in the way of a deadline, and what's a painter to do when snow, cold, rain, high humidity, wind, or other harsh conditions threaten to shut down a job?

"As good as cold-cure products are in chilly weather, their rapid-dry characteristics can result in unsightly lap marks."

To start, find out if there are any new paint products that address

the conditions you face. In recent years major paint manufacturers have come up with a number of paint formulas to battle inclement weather. One of those innovations is cold-cure paint. The best of these paints are specified for application at temperatures as low as -2 Celsius. In a cold-weather city such as Ottawa, cold-cure paint can extend a painter's season by several weeks.

But with any new innovation comes limitations. As good as cold-cure products are in chilly weather, their rapid-dry characteristics can result in unsightly lap marks (levelling problems) when applied in warmer temperatures, points out Jarrett Mitchell, part-owner of Halifax-based Certapro Painters. "They are a specialty paint. Don't use them in all conditions," he says.

Another recent development is direct-to-metal (DTM) latex paint. Suitable for exterior metal surfaces subjected to lots of wear and tear, such

as school doors, DTM is more durable than traditional latex paint and dries in as little five minutes. On windy days, DTM offers painters a big advantage over its slow-drying alkyd cousins, points out Steve Blasiak, a Toronto-based independent paint training consultant with a company called AHA's.

"Given the leaps in paint technology in recent years, today's best painters aren't always the ones with the most experience."

Moisture, paint's worst enemy, comes in a number of forms, including one many painters overlook: condensation. Years ago, when Blasiak sold paint for a living in Toronto, he got at least four complaints from painters

every fall about spots and dark and light stains forming on freshly painted surfaces, particularly metal. In most cases the source of the problem was condensation.

A rule of thumb, he says, when painting exterior metal in late fall is to start early in the day or whenever the temperature is on the rise. Acrylic latex paints dry quicker than alkyds, but if drying time is not a concern and the surface is in for a beating (the bumps, dents, and scrapes that kids dish out on school doors) a high-sheen synthetic oil might be the wise choice because it is the most durable.

Blasiak points out that discoloration due to condensation can happen just about any time of year – even in summer. “You can use common sense, call in experts for second opinions, and still something can go wrong. It is like this: If you want to get the job done right 100 per cent of the time, don’t paint at all. Or take the door off its hinges and paint inside.”

Formerly a commercial/residential painter, Blasiak now spends more time presenting seminars on paint and its application. Interestingly, he says, given the leaps in paint technology in recent years, today’s best painters aren’t always the ones with the most experience. “I’d rather go with the kid who just opened up a paint company and has done lots of research on different paint technology, than an experienced guy who isn’t up on new paint formulas.”



Photo: Darren Greer Sandblasting

“Don’t tinker with the paint formula.”

Whenver applying paint, Blasiak and Mitchell agree that painters should strictly adhere to the manufacturer’s specifications. Equally important, don’t tinker with the paint formula. Gasoline is not a speed-drying agent, but that hasn’t stopped some painters

from adding it to the can. Kerosene, too, has been said to have magical paint-enhancing properties. Don’t believe it. Manufacturers spend big bucks and years of research developing their formulas.

There are, however, additives, such as Japan Dryers, which are recommended by paint manufacturers. Ideal in colder seasons, Japan Dryers accelerate solvent evaporation and diminish cure time of alkyd paints. At Neighbor’s Paint, a paint supply store in Toronto, sales of Japan Dryer skyrocket in late fall, points out owner Russell Ward.

Still, such additives are not a cold-weather panacea. “With a Japan Dryer, instead of the paint taking, say, six days to fully cure, it may take only four days,” explains Blasiak. His advice: Follow the manufacturer’s specs to a tee. “Loading up” on Japan Dryer, as some painters do, is foolhardy and likely to result in the paint cracking.

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Ward, who has been painting since the early 1970s, says painters who are in a race against an incoming



RUSSELL WARD

Photo: Stephen Ferrie

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cold-weather front should consider only applying primer. Apply the finish coats when weather warms – even if that is a season away.

rough areas resulting from wood movement, apply touch-ups, then the final coat. "The problem is that if you apply two topcoats (at once) there is a good

mate, paint quality, and, most importantly, surface preparation, which constitutes at least 80 per cent of most big paint jobs, say experts. Expect to spend even more time preparing exterior surfaces when conditions are harsh, points out Silvio Borsato of Borsato Painting in Ottawa. Cleaning, sanding, and patching are time-consuming and demanding work, but complaints are few when prep is done right, notes Borsato who is often called in to repair another painter's mistakes.

Preparation is especially important in areas such as the weather-battered coastlines of the Maritime provinces. For Certapro Painters, prepping the wood siding on buildings along Nova Scotia's rugged shores involves a three-part cleaning process. A power wash containing a 50/50 bleach/water mix is followed by a TSP/water-pressure wash before a final clean water-pressure wash is applied to remove chemical residue. This pressure rinse also serves to dilute the TSP and bleach run-off to environmentally acceptable levels, says Mitchell.

After drying for about one week, the surface is then inspected with a moisture meter. Ten to 12 per cent moisture content is ideal; more than 15 per cent is deemed unpaintable because trapped moisture often leads to premature paint failure. Once the wood surface is dry enough, Certapro Painters scrape it bare and conduct a second moisture



Photo: Darren Greer Sandblasting

He says often painters have only themselves to blame for getting caught painting in cold weather. "Plan ahead of time for cold weather. Don't wait for it to arrive. If you find out when the materials are being delivered to the jobsite you can often paint them before they are installed. If it is already getting cold, take them inside to paint."

Ward says a common problem project is tongue-and-groove wood decks. He recommends applying the topcoats a season apart. Apply one finish coat, then return the following season to sand back

chance you'll have to sand back two coats of paint the next season. Sanding is not the easiest thing to do, especially if it is polyurethane floor enamel."

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A well-done exterior paint job lasts five to 10 years, depending on cli-

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test before applying an alkyd primer. The company topcoats with 100 per cent acrylic latex, which can “flex” with movement in wood, unlike alkyds, which can crack.

Aside from weather obstacles, painters often face physical barriers to getting a job done. Confined sites can be a tight squeeze when ladders and scaffolding are required. Some paint companies such as Certapro see manlifts with articulating arms and straight-stick booms as a solution.

Sap-dropping trees can be another source of frustration. Painting over fresh sap droplets is a recipe for paint failure, Blasiak says. Sanding or power washing are often necessary, but if it is the season for sap to run, surfaces require protection. This is especially the case when there is a week or more lag time between subsequent coat applications.

“By eliminating load-up time, these spray/roller combos cut up to 25 per cent off roll time”

In some instances, spray painting is the only means of beating a bad weather front. But while spray painting can cut significant time off a job, it has its limitations. For starters, the



STEVE BLASIAK

Photo: Stephen Ferrie

spray can carry on wind currents up to a kilometre, points out Blasiak, recounting the story of a contractor who unintentionally sprayed two dozen cars while spray painting the exterior of a shopping mall. “It cost him a tremendous amount of money to compensate the car owners.” A dry-fall paint or mobile tent could have saved that painter a lot of money.

An alternative to spray painting is applying paint with one of the new breed of rollers attached to sprayers. Certapro’s Mitchell says by eliminating load-up time, these spray/roller combos cut up to 25 per cent off roll time. Essentially, the spray attachment runs through the roller pole into a perforated roller. New more user-friendly masking tools and multi-head sprayers also cut time.

On the West Coast, where rain is a

major problem, latex-based stains can be an alternative to paint. A new water-based stain made by Napier can be applied to wet wood surfaces, but it, like all stains, has a shorter lifespan than paint. “It may look good only for nine months to a year,” points out Manuel Fernandes, a long-time painter currently an inspector for the Vancouver-based Master Painters & Decorators Association. “Paint will last seven to 10 years and will protect the substrate better.”

In the rainy climate of Vancouver, Fernandes isn’t a proponent of paint shelters and heaters because they are expensive. However, without a shelter, a West Coast painter often only has two good months to paint a year - usually August and September. Like most regions in Canada, it is a tight window. And one that keeps outdoor painters on their toes.