

## *Preventative Maintenance for Stucco Homes*

Preventative maintenance of synthetic (EIFS) and hard coat stucco exterior cladding is essential to the durability and longevity of the siding. The majority of problems experienced with stucco involve moisture intrusion as a result of incorrect flashings, sealants and maintenance of the system, not the stucco itself. The following items are provided as an aid to homeowners in an effort to properly maintain their home.

- Caulk all joints where the stucco abuts dissimilar materials, such as doors, windows, lights, electrical receptacles, etc., to ensure that the building envelope remains watertight. We recommend that all finish coat be removed from the wood trim and a clean joint tooled to ensure a proper seal. The addition of backer rod between the synthetic stucco and dissimilar material is recommended by many manufacturer's and will most likely result in a more durable seal.
- At windows and doors without metal flashing, the homeowner may consider the addition of a metal drip cap. The addition of flashing is usually not necessary at penetrations with trim bands and those locations covered by eaves, such as second story windows. We do not recommend the addition of flashing at radius windows since the top edges are rounded and do not promote ponding of water.
- Keep all wood trim sealed and painted. This is an on-going, annual process as wood expands and contracts with changes in temperature and humidity.
- Most window sills are two-piece, therefore, it is essential that the joints between the two pieces are sealed to prevent water infiltration.
- Monitor areas where the roof lines intersect the synthetic stucco, such as chimneys and dormers. If metal "kick-out" flashing is not seen at the bottom of the roof at the gutter, homeowner should consider having it installed.
- Damaged or missing flashings should be repaired or replaced. Cracked or deteriorated sealants should be repaired, or removed and replaced.
- Trees and shrubs should be cut back from the house. Check sprinklers to make sure they are not directed at the stucco.
- Proper roof drainage is essential. Keep gutters clean without overspill which can lead to problems.
- Building codes prior to 1996 required perimeter slab insulation. Recent changes to building codes have removed this requirement as a result of the potential for termites to tunnel underneath the foam insulation. We recommend homeowners consult with their termite company regarding this issue and explore all options including cutting the stucco above grade, re-grading to expose the foundation, re-treatment, or alternative treatment such as Sentricon.
- Recommended sealant material is Dow Corning 795 silicone building sealant, which is available in colors to closely match the existing finish. Alternatively, 40 to 50 year silicone sealants are available in clear from local building suppliers. Dow 795 can be obtained locally from Fred Hiller of Georgia, 770-451-4661.

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## ***Synthetic Stucco - Where to look for leaks***

Many people ask for advice on where to look for potential leaks in their synthetic stucco (EIFS) house. The following list contains the areas which are most susceptible to water intrusion. Please note that water intrusion is usually not evident from the exterior of the house. Any area where you suspect water has gotten behind the synthetic stucco should be tested by a qualified inspector.

- Synthetic stucco, or Exterior Insulation Finish Systems (EIFS), are barrier type systems, also referred to as "surface sealed". This type of exterior cladding has no provision for routing water that has migrated to the interior of the wall system back to the outside. Thus, if water gets in, it can stay there, leading to rot and mildew. It is not sufficient to simply butt the EIFS against another material. These joints need to be sealed with a flexible, elastic sealant.
- Typically water does not leak through the synthetic stucco itself, but at locations where the stucco abuts dissimilar materials. Unless you see cracks in the synthetic stucco, the first place to look is not the stucco.
- Intersections between the EIFS walls and sloped roofs are likely locations. Check at the lower end of the roof at the gutter or fascia. There should be "kick-out" flashings at this location. If not, water flowing down the roof slope can literally be driven into the wall system. Check window headers to see if flashing or drip caps are installed. A drip is a flashing which makes the water break away from the vertical surface and fall free of the building. If not present, water can flow towards the windows, increasing the chance of a leak.
- Look for "crickets" behind chimneys where it intersects the roof. Crickets are designed to shed water from behind the chimney. If a cricket is not present, water can potentially pond at the chimney/roof juncture and leak into the house.
- Check windows, especially at lower corners. Water can sometimes get in through the window frame itself (via gaps in the window framing) or the window/EIFS junction.
- Deck beam penetrations through the EIFS are possible leak sources. These areas should be flashed, not just caulked shut.
- Inspect all penetrations through the EIFS, such as hose bibbs, air conditioning hoses, conduits, etc. These also need to be sealed water tight.
- Caulked joints can leak even if they appear watertight. The caulk may be tight against the EIFS, but may actually not be bonded to it.
- Artificial joints in the EIFS, referred to as expansion or aesthetic joints, are used to create visual effects by placing a groove in the surface. Such joints do not contain caulking. These joints create a plane of weakness in the EIFS can crack. Look for a continuous crack at the base of the groove. Water can get into the crack and behind the EIFS.

🔍 [Back](#)

## ***Stucco Cleaning Solution***

Stucco finishes that have become soiled may be cleaned by the following solution:

- 1 gallon warm water
- 1 quart household bleach
- 1 cup trisodium phosphate (TSP), available at Home Depot paint dept.

Apply the solution to the entire area and lightly agitate with a soft bristle brush. Rinse thoroughly with clean water.

For heavily soiled areas, commercially available products such as "Wash Down" and "Finish Up" are available locally from Demand Products, 770-772-7448.

Whenever cleaning a synthetic stucco surface, it is imperative that gentle brushing and agitation be used versus forcefulness. All applications and rinsing should be as gentle as possible, as excessive pressure may do more harm than good.

[Home](#)