

# SAY WHAT?

## INDUSTRY ISSUES THAT CAN'T BE IGNORED

by Mike Hilborn

**W**hat would happen to your power washing business if suddenly there were building codes preventing you from power washing wood? I was shocked to find out that this was on the verge of potentially happening. Two years ago as a PWNA representative, I attended a meeting of the Wood Coatings and Forest Products committee and learned that this group of professionals who gather to learn, educate, direct, and promote the proper use of wood were about to write a paper to recommend against using a power washer to clean wood.

Such a statement would be highly regarded and used by municipalities for making building codes since the people on the committee come from DuPont, Dow, PPG, Sherwin Williams, the US Forestry Department, the Western Red Cedar Association, and the Cedar Shake and Shingle Bureau. But being a representative of the PWNA and having been in the wood restoration business for the past 14 years, I knew they were missing out on some valuable information that needed to be understood by the committee immediately.

Fortunately, they were open to learning what I know and understanding the techniques used and the committee opinion has since changed. Now as the chairman of this committee, I have recently written those methods and procedures for using a power washer to maintain wood which I discussed with the committee. Since the committee members are all pro-wood for various reasons, it is significant to have the backing of this committee for those of us who would like to

continue to have a business which maintains wood with the benefits of using power washers. The PWNA needs to continue to be involved in these conversations asking questions such as my recent one "How do you get water-based coatings off?"

That was the simple question I asked after listening to much discussion about VOC requirements which have pushed manufacturers into developing more water-based products. As anyone in the wood restoration business knows, water-based products are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to remove via strippers. The only way to remove them is by sanding. Even then, the only areas that can be effectively and efficiently sanded are walking surfaces, such as the floor and steps, and the top of handrails. The question of "How do you get it off?" was responded to with an honest "We never ask ourselves that question." Of the several manufacturers represented, no one said they had a way to maintain their product over the long run. That made me very worried.

To get the value out of wood, we need to be able to protect it over a 15- to 20-year span. A coating that lasts only five years and cannot be effectively removed, so that it can be maintained for another stretch of time, is unusable

for long-term wood preservation. This discussion is just beginning. Since the Wood Coatings and Forest Products committee is not about selling products but about the long-term maintenance and viability of wood, it needs to consider this essential component as they develop their influential recommendations. The PWNA will continue to add input wherever possible.

One frustration I also expressed is the way manufacturers' labels use the phrase "solid color stains" for what is essentially a type of paint. This labeling creates much confusion and frustration with the consumers who think they are getting an actual stain. It is never pretty to explain to a potential customer that restoring their wood is now a much more expensive endeavor involving sanding which may not produce the like-new look they want in those hard or impossible areas to sand.

One of PWNA's missions is to be a clear voice for our industry. Whether your business is large or small, if a code gets written or an unreasonable law gets passed that restricts the use of a power washer, we are all potentially out of business. I want to encourage everyone that has built or wants to build a

power washing business to join the PWNA so we can be a voice together.

Robert Hinderliter, Environmental Chair of the PWNA, works across the country advising of reasonable and effective water containment

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methods to protect our lakes and streams. Doc Reisman, NFPA representative for the PWNA, ensures rules and codes for kitchen exhaust cleaners are effective and reasonable.

The stronger and larger the membership of the PWNA, the better we are heard. Do us and especially yourself the favor of becoming a member now at [www.pwna.org](http://www.pwna.org).

*Mike Hilborn is the PWNA executive director and president of Roof-to-Deck Restoration, Inc. ☞*

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