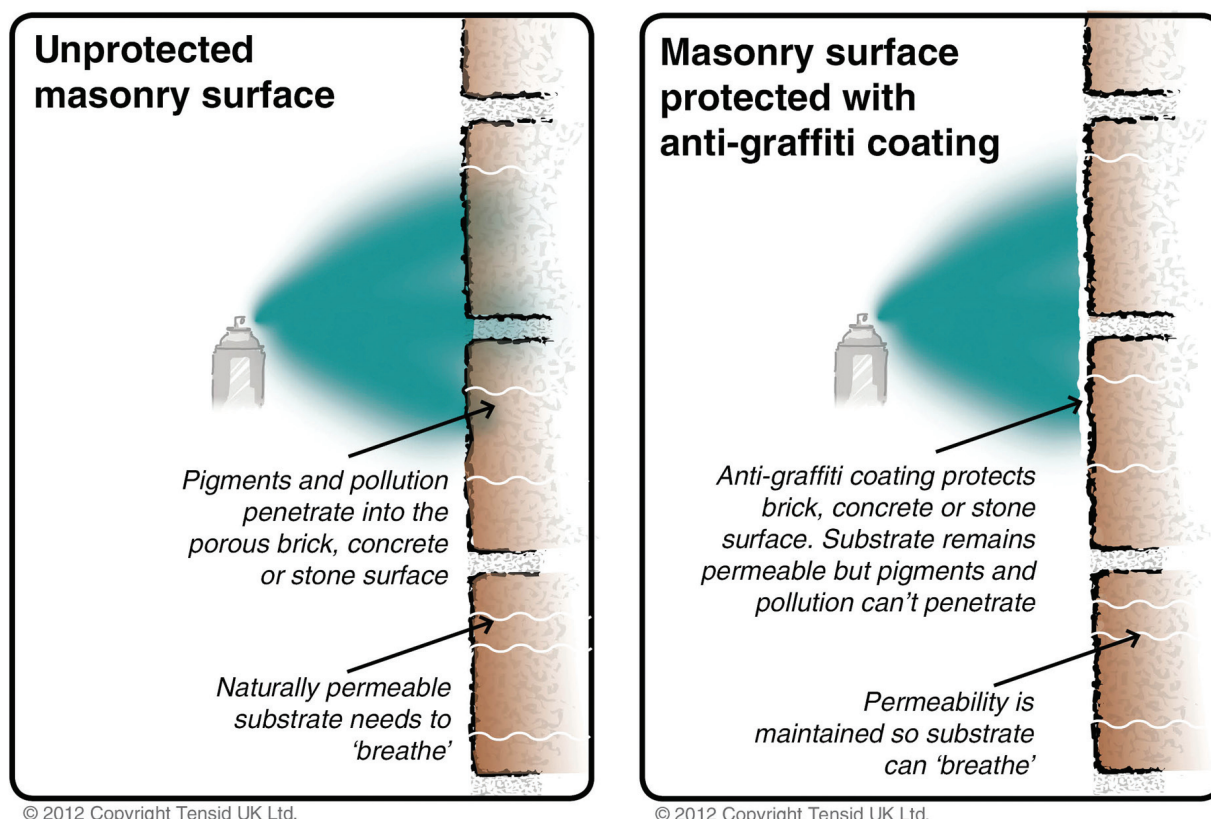


# Graffiti? Stop it at the surface

## Anti-graffiti coatings provide invisible protection



### BRIAN KLELUND describes two ways to protect masonry against graffiti

In the UK alone, millions of pounds a year are spent removing graffiti from the built surfaces of our communities and businesses. For example, Network Rail states they spend more than £3.5 million a year on graffiti removal.

There are good reasons for this effort that go beyond the aspect of aesthetics. A degradation in social standards often follows when an area is increasingly blighted by graffiti. Gangs visually 'tag' areas to make their presence known and graffiti tends to attract more graffiti.

The 'Broken Window' theory states that maintaining and monitoring urban environments in a well-ordered condition may stop further vandalism and escalation into more serious crime. A 1996 criminology and urban sociology book, *'Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities'* by George L. Kelling and Catharine Coles, is based on this theory. The

book's authors suggest that a successful strategy for preventing vandalism is to fix the problems when they are small.

The good news is that there are proactive ways to stop graffiti and pollution from penetrating surfaces in the first place! One of the more important tools used in keeping surfaces free of graffiti is the application of an anti-graffiti coating.

Anti-graffiti coatings work in two ways. Firstly, the coatings make surfaces more resistant to the penetration of spray paint pigment, grime and pollution. Secondly, the removal of graffiti is made much easier to achieve without damaging the underlying substrate.

It's not as straightforward as simply slapping-on a sealant. Anti-graffiti coatings often need to be invisible and retain the essential functioning nature of the substrate to which they are applied. In the case of brick and

masonry, it is very important that the treated structure remains permeable so the substrate can continue to 'breathe'. This is vital for managing damp and moisture that naturally occurs within the structure.

Also, there is most often a wish to not change the basic appearance of a surface. For example, you don't necessarily want a brick wall to appear varnished.

Anti-graffiti coatings have been carefully and successfully engineered to achieve maximum protection for the surface while maintaining the desired qualities of the substrate.

Let's take a look at two popular types of coatings that have been used successfully by councils and contractors:

#### **Sacrificial anti-graffiti coatings**

Masonry surfaces need to be able to breathe. Damp and moisture needs a way to escape so the building stays healthy and structurally



The advantages of using a sacrificial anti-graffiti coating are that graffiti and grime can be removed using only water, without the need for chemicals. This is especially desirable in areas that are being regularly targeted by graffiti vandals, and reduces the wear and tear on the substrate from repeated graffiti removal. Sacrificial-graffiti coatings are surprisingly durable and it is not uncommon for a single treatment to last ten years in situations where

Another key benefit of a sacrificial anti-graffiti coating is the resulting speed and ease of graffiti removal. When compared with graffiti removal from an uncoated wall, the time

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