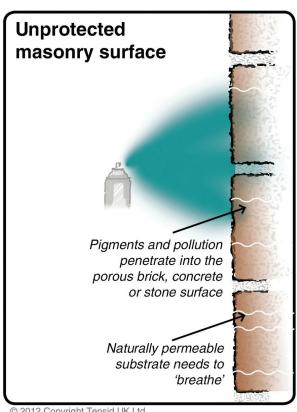
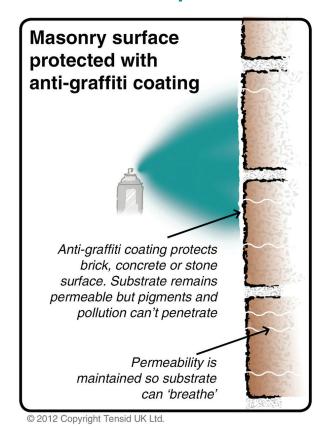


Graffiti? Stop it at the surface

Anti-graffiti coatings provide invisible protection





© 2012 Copyright Tensid UK Ltd.

BRIAN KLELUND describes two ways to protect masonry against graffiti

n 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







Graffiti



sound. Graffiti paint and marker pen ink often penetrates these porous surfaces.

What is the best way to seal the surface without losing the permeability and the material's natural ability to wick moisture for evaporation? One answer is a microcrystalline wax coating. This coating contains micropores that are so tiny that pigment and pollution are blocked from penetrating into the surface, yet the substrate can continue to breathe.

The objective for a sacrificial anti-graffiti coating is to safely coat and protect the surface in such a way that any graffiti AND the coating are easily washed away with a hot water pressure washer. The coating is then reapplied for future surface protection. This can be repeated as often as needed without any change or damage to the masonry.

The advantages of using a sacrificial antigraffiti 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

An anti-graffiti coating was utilised in spectacular fashion by the Tate Modern Art Gallery in London during the Street Art exhibition in 2008. First, the outside walls of the gallery were coated with an anti-graffiti coating, then international artists were invited to create enormous spray-painted art creations on the fascia of the building. When the exhibition concluded, both the paint and the protective coating were removed using hot pressure washing. Over the course of a three-week period, all six areas of 'Street-Art' were removed successfully, to the complete satisfaction of the gallery. The listed building was treated with extreme care to ensure that the original underlying façade remained exactly the same as before treatment.

there has been no need to clean the surface.

Another key benefit of a sacrificial antigraffiti coating is the resulting speed and ease of graffiti removal. When compared with graffiti removal from an uncoated wall, the time required to remove graffiti from a treated area can be reduced by up to 80 per cent. This translates into significant cost savings, and the opportunity to utilize the saved time to clean a greater number of areas.

Permanent anti-graffiti coatings

Permanent anti-graffiti coatings seal the surface so that paint and ink will not penetrate the coating. These coatings are generally for use on hard surfaces, but can also be used on brick and natural stone if permeability is not important. This approach means that the substrate is permanently changed so it becomes resistant to pigments and pollutants, and resists water ingress and egress. An easy-to-clean surface is the result. Permanent coatings are particularly useful on internal and previously painted surfaces, or where access with pressure washing equipment is restrictive.

Both sacrificial and permanent anti-graffiti coatings are being used successfully on the London Underground and many other public places. The potential for invisible protection against graffiti at the surface is limitless.

Brian Klelund is the proprietor and CEO of Tensid UK Ltd.





