

Pressure Washing

The online world is a wonderful resource for information, especially for log homes. However, use caution because there is also a large amount of misinformation posted on various web sites. One of the inaccurate statements is the claim that pressure washing a home increases the moisture content of the wood to the extent that it must be allowed to dry for weeks before a finish is applied. If you do not, there is a good chance that the wood will begin to rot. This is not entirely accurate.

Wood cells are shaped like soda straws. As the wood dries the cells get narrower and the “valves” between the cells close. Since the cells run the length of the log, there is not much radial transference of water across the grain of the wood. As a result, if the sides of the log get wet, the water does not penetrate much deeper than the first few layers of cells. That is why it takes the addition of glycols in borate solutions to facilitate deeper penetration into a log along its length. On the other hand, the cells on the log ends are open and water can certainly soak into the wood, but it can also evaporate just as easily. In other words, even pressure washing will not drive water into the side of a log more than ca. 1/16". In warm dry weather the wood will be dry within a few hours.

Another reason it is important to allow a day for a home to dry after pressure washing, is to allow water that accumulates in checks and fissures to evaporate. It is also important that all checks be well rinsed when pressure washing after applying a chemical stripper or cleaner. We have seen several situations where stripper or cleaner residue left in checks has resulted in subsequent adhesion issues. If a check or fissure remains dark, it is most likely not dry. Measuring the water content in checks with a moisture meter and Q-tip can be helpful in determining if the checks are dry enough to apply a stain or sealants. Environmental conditions such as temperature, humidity and sunlight will affect how quickly the water will evaporate.

So when should a home be pressure washed? We recommend using a pressure washer when preparing a home for a new finish. It takes the power of a pressure washer to completely take off the (1) softened finish after the application of a finish remover and (2) dirt/discolorations and mill glaze from bare wood. To avoid streaks and runs, clean from the bottom up and rinse from the top down. A pressure washer will test the sealant system of a home. Water will likely enter the home, so have some one inside, with some towels, to dry and mark water entry points for later inspection and sealing.

Pressure washing is not recommended for maintenance cleaning an existing finish. You never want to damage your beautiful LIFELINE™ finish with an overly aggressive pressure washing. After media blasting or sanding we recommend washing the surface of the wood with a Log Wash™ solution. This will remove any dust particles as well as pollen or other contaminants that may be adhering to the wood. In this case either a garden hose or a light pressure washing will work. All you need to do is wash the surface with enough water to rinse off the Log Wash™ and dirt. Also, it is not recommended to apply removers and cleaners with a pressure washer.

Selecting the correct pressure washer for the job is critical. One of the most important features is the water output volume. It should have an output of at least two to three gallons of water per minute (2-3 gpm). Small electric pressure washers may generate enough pressure, but they only put out about 1/2 gallon per minute. As a result, these low volume pressure washers are not suitable for cleaning a wall down to bare wood. Hot water or steam pressure washers are an overkill, and if the operator is not careful, they can damage the wood.

Although a good pressure washer typically generates 2,500 to 3,000 pound of pressure, psi, it does not mean that you need that much pressure to clean the surface. You want to hit the surface of wood with no more than 600 psi to avoid excessive feathering. The higher pressure allows you to stand back from the wall and clean off a wider swath with each pass of the wand tip. For removing old finishes we recommend using a 25 degree fan tip or an adjustable nozzle if available.

General Purpose Pressure Washer



Hot Water Pressure Washer



Proper Technique for Pressure Washing

