HOME
REPAIR
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CENTER

for do-self or contracted repairs

HOUSE PAINTING – WHERE DO I START?

House painting is one of these jobs that homeowners tend to put off as long as possible. When it's finally time to "bite the bullet" and put up the ladders, proper preparation of the paint surface will add years to your paint job. If you plan to do the painting yourself, allow adequate time for this preparation work before you open the paint cans. If you will be contracting, be sure to discuss with the painter how you want the finished surface to look, how much preparation work will be necessary to achieve that appearance, and how much that preparation will cost.

Before you start painting, check for any repairs needed to the siding and trim. Replace all rotted, decayed, or badly cracked wood, and re-nail any loose siding. Countersink any rusty nail heads 1/8" deep and putty over the top. Replace loose nails with slightly larger ones, and counter-sink and putty over them. Fill nail holes and small surface cracks with vinyl spackling.

While you're at it, check the condition of the caulk and glazing around your doors and windows. Check, too, for cracks or openings where moisture can enter the walls, especially where siding butts against a roof slope or masonry. Remove any caulk that has deteriorated, and replace it with fresh material, using a caulking gun. (You may have to press some of the caulk in place with a putty knife.) A **siliconized acrylic caulk** generally stays flexible and in place for the longest time, and it can be painted. Install new **glazing compound** when the old glazing has dried out and no longer makes an effective seal between the window frame and the glass pane. *(See separate handout on "Window Glazing & Glass Replacement" for how-to information.)*

The next problem is dealing with old paint that has built up on the surface of your house over the years. In most cases, that old paint will have cracked or "checkered," allowing moisture to get behind the paint layer. Before applying new paint, you need to remove that damaged paint.

> *However, if your house was built before 1978, there is a good chance that one or more of those layers of old paint may contain lead. In dealing with any loose, blistering, or peeling areas, you must be careful to protect yourself and your environment from this lead-based paint.*

Because of the danger when lead-laden dust contaminates the soil around your house or is released into the atmosphere, certain methods of removing paint are now prohibited. **Many communities with older homes, including Cleveland Heights, do not allow dry sanding or dry scraping**, except dry scraping in conjunction with heat guns or immediately around electrical outlets, or when treating small spots of defective paint (totaling no more than 20 square feet on exterior surfaces.) Code also prohibits use of an open flame or burning torch, or a heat gun that operates above 1100° Fahrenheit or that chars the paint. And, code does not allow removal of paint by machine sanding or grinding, abrasive blasting or sand-blasting, or volatile paint strippers. (There are a few paint strippers that claim to remove lead paint safely, but they tend to be rather expensive, especially for the whole exterior surface of a house.)

So, what *do* you do to remove chipping or peeling paint? The best solution is to cover the ground below all work areas with tarps, and then remove as much loose paint as possible by

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wet scraping. You can use a garden hose or spray bottle to keep the surface damp; the moisture makes the paint chips heavier, so they will fall onto the tarp rather than floating through the air and contaminating surrounding areas. *(See separate handout on "Controlling Lead-Based Paint during Your Paint Repair Project"* for specific "how-to" advice on outdoor projects.) Place all paint chips in a 4 mil (contractor grade) plastic garbage bag and close it securely before disposal. Then, if desired, wash down the house with a pressure washer. (Make sure to use the lower-pressure "wash" setting that doesn't disturb the old paint.) Use a commercial-type cleaner such as **TSP** (Tri-Sodium Phosphate), available at hardware and building supply stores. Rinse well with clean water, and allow several days for the wood to dry completely – longer if it's rainy or very humid.

The next step is to fill in any "craters" (areas where the bare wood is lower than the painted areas around them) with **exterior vinyl spackling**, so they come up level with the surrounding areas. Not only will this give a neat finish when painted, but it isn't any more work than sanding. Moreover, this method is 100% safer than sanding lead-based paint.

If there are areas where your paint fails repeatedly, think about what's on the other side of the siding. Blistering paint can be caused by condensation in the outer walls of your house – particularly in high-moisture areas, such as outside bathrooms or under kitchen sinks. You can install **small louvered vents** in the siding to increase air flow and help keep these areas dry.

Finally, remove any rust that has build up on metal surfaces. After scraping, cover these surfaces with a **rust-inhibiting primer**. *(See separate handout on "Special Problems in Preparing Surfaces for Painting" for more details.)*

Now you're ready to paint. At a minimum, "spot prime" any bare wood and over any spackling you have applied. (Of course, a full coat of **primer** is best.) Then you can apply the final coat of paint. The paint you use can affect how long your paint job lasts. The priming coat must be able to bond to all types of existing paint on your house and also to the new paint you'll be using. Check with your paint supplier. **Latex paint** will let water evaporate through it without blistering and peeling, but it will expand and contract at a different rate than **oil-based paint**. *(See separate handout on "How to Measure Your House for Paint" for help in calculating how much paint to buy.)*

While you're painting, you'll want to protect the plants, sidewalks, and other surrounding areas around your house. You'll also have to check the weather. Make sure it's not too wet (wait for the morning dew to evaporate before starting) or too cold (the temperature should be above 50° F.) If you're painting in the sun, plan to *follow* the sun around the house. The heat of direct sunlight can cause the moisture in the paint or the surface underneath it to evaporate and form blisters.

Paint from the top down and from side to side, being generous with the paint. If you have to stop midway, try to complete the entire siding board, to avoid lap marks.

So remember – a bit more time spent in preparation will give you a longer-lasting paint job, and one that's more attractive, too.