

Caring for Your Aluminum Cladding

THE SHORT VERSION

Extruded aluminum asks very little of you. It does ask for a wash, on a schedule that depends on where the building is and what the weather throws at it.

- Most buildings: wash once a year.
- Urban or coastal buildings: wash every six months.
- Use water, a mild detergent and a soft cloth. Nothing else.
- Never use a pressure washer or anything abrasive.

HOW OFTEN

Find the row that matches the building, not the one that sounds most convenient.

Where the building is	How often	What washing is dealing with
Rural or suburban, light traffic, clean air	Every 12 months	General soiling and airborne dust
Urban, busy roads, near rail or industry	Every 6 months	Carbon and diesel particulate, atmospheric fallout, and the dirt streaking that runs down below sills and copings
Within about 500 m of tidal or brackish water	Every 6 months	Airborne salt. Aluminum handles coastal air well, but only if the salt is rinsed off rather than left to sit
Elevations that catch road salt spray or splash	Every 6 months, plus once when winter ends	De-icing salt, brine and ice-melt residue on lower storeys, parkade entries and walkway-adjacent walls
Anywhere reached by sprinklers or equipment discharge	Every 3 months	Hard water and mineral deposits. Redirect the sprinkler as well, since washing alone will not keep up with it
Soffits, recesses and anywhere under cover	With the rest of that elevation	Rain never reaches these areas, so soiling builds up faster than on the walls around them
New construction, before handover	Once	Mortar and cement splash, adhesive residue, sealant smears and site dust, all much easier to remove before they cure

HOW TO WASH IT

Five steps, top to bottom, on a cool day.

1. **Rinse first.** Clean fresh water over the whole elevation, working from the top down, to carry off loose dirt and grit before anything touches the surface.
2. **Wash gently.** A soft cloth, sponge or soft-bristle brush with water and a mild detergent. Anything in the pH 5 to 9 range, which covers most household dish soaps. Work in sections and do not let the detergent dry on the surface.
3. **Rinse thoroughly.** Clean water again, until no detergent film is left, then let it air dry.

4. **Pick your day.** Wash in shade or in cool conditions. Never wash a surface that is hot to the touch or sitting in strong direct sun. It dries too fast and leaves streaks.
5. **Test first if you are unsure.** Try any cleaner on a small, out-of-sight area and give it time before doing the whole wall.

WHAT NOT TO USE

- Pressure washers. They drive water into joints and laps and can cut the finish. If a low-pressure rinse is unavoidable, stay well under 1,200 psi, hold the nozzle at least 12 inches back, use a wide fan tip, and never aim into joints or terminations.
- Abrasives. No scouring pads, scouring powders, wire brushes, blades or scrapers. They leave permanent burnishing even when the finish underneath is sound.
- Solvents. No MEK, acetone, lacquer thinner or paint remover.
- Acid or strongly alkaline cleaners. This includes acid descalers, brick and masonry cleaners, and oven cleaner. Acid descalers are the usual culprit when someone tries to attack hard water stains and damages the coating instead.

YOUR FINISH MATTERS

The method above suits every Engage finish. A few need something extra.

Finish	What to know
Kynar 70% PVDF (QuickPanel®)	The most durable finish we supply. Nothing extra required. Wash on the schedule above and it will look after itself.
Solid powder coat (all products)	Nothing extra required. Wash on the schedule above.
Sublimated woodgrain (FastPlank®)	The woodgrain image sits within the coating rather than on top of it, so it cannot be touched up or refinished in the field. Wash gently and keep abrasives well away. A scratch deep enough to reach through the coating exposes the plain base tone underneath, and there is no way to restore the grain on site.
Mica and metallic (FastPlank, QuickPanels)	These finishes hold their appearance well but show burnishing more readily than a flat color. Rubbing one area harder than the rest will leave a visible patch, so keep pressure even and never spot-scrub.
Acrylic latex (EasyTrim Reveals® custom colors)	A softer, air-dry paint finish used on some custom color orders. It picks up dirt more readily and will need washing more often. Treat it as one step up the schedule. The upside: unlike our other finishes, it can be cleaned, touched up and recoated with a compatible acrylic latex when it eventually needs freshening. Plan on recoating as part of normal building maintenance.
Primed (EasyTrim Reveals)	Supplied primed for painting by others. Follow the maintenance guidance from whoever supplied the topcoat. The paint on the surface is theirs, not ours.

WORTH ACTING ON SOONER

Five things that get worse quickly if left.

Sprinklers hitting the wall

Irrigation overspray is the most common cause of staining we see, and it is entirely preventable. Redirect or adjust the heads so they do not reach the cladding. Hard water leaves mineral deposits that get harder to remove the longer they sit, and the aggressive cleaners people reach for to remove them do more damage than the deposits.

Mortar, concrete or stucco splash

Wet cementitious material is alkaline and attacks aluminum. Get it off while it is still wet. Once it cures it usually cannot be removed without damaging the finish.

Road salt on lower storeys

Salt spray from a plowed road or a parkade ramp sits on the wall all winter. A rinse when the season ends removes it before it can do anything, and costs almost nothing.

Anything in contact with copper, lead or treated lumber

Aluminum and copper do not get along, and modern pressure-treated lumber is copper-based. Water running off copper flashings, or trim sitting directly against treated wood without a separating membrane, will corrode the aluminum. If you find this on a building, fix the detail rather than just cleaning the mark.

Scratches and impact damage

Most damage we see arrives after installation: scaffold coming down, window cleaners, ladders, string trimmers, snow removal. Worth a word with any trade working near a finished elevation.

KEEP A SIMPLE RECORD

Keep a record

Note what was cleaned, when, and by whom. A dated log takes a minute and it is what supports a warranty claim years later. Regular maintenance is a condition of coverage, and a record is the easiest way to show it. A note in a building file or a photo with a date on it is enough.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide covers routine cleaning and maintenance of Engage Building Products extruded aluminum cladding. It accompanies, and does not replace, the Engage Building Products Limited Warranty and the published installation instructions for your product, which govern coverage. Questions about a specific building or finish are best answered by your project manager.