

Primers and Sealers after a Fire

The introduction of primers and sealers to the fire and smoke damage restoration market has proved restoration contractors a method to address stubborn and lingering smoke stains and odors. This process is sometimes referred to as “contamination isolation”. Contamination isolation embeds residues under an impervious coating. This coating is commonly called a sealer which is said to permanently block fire products and odors, thereby restoring surfaces to their pre-fire state.

Uncontrolled combustion produces a mix of partially oxidized particles, gases, liquids, and aerosols, some of which settle and adhere to surfaces. Some of these residues corrode metals or produce other undesirable outcomes. Volatile emissions from fire residues may continue to be present after the fire has been extinguished, as well as odors that could be hardly noticeable to extremely pungent. The use of primers and sealers help to block odor and return the surface back to their pre-loss condition.

Paint primers are coatings formulated to adhere to a substrate and create a uniform surface for the finish coat. Primers are intended to be used on specific surfaces. Latex or water based primers are primarily used for unfinished drywall and exterior use. Oil-based primers are typically used for raw wood. Many primers have specialized ingredients such as stain-inhibiting tannin blockers, corrosion inhibitors, or preservatives.

Sealers on the other hand are designed to be used before or in place of a primer. A key role for sealers has traditionally been to bind porous surfaces such as a crumbly concrete or plaster. Sealers are specifically designed to seal off surface porosity and block stains. Sealers and primers share many characteristics and thus the terms are used interchangeably. Some of the most popular sealer brands are Kilz, B-I-N, and Recon.

In current fire repair practice, sealers are applied to isolate and bond settled combustion particles, hide heat and smoke discoloration, and prevent transmission of smoke odors. A white pigment is typically added to enhance the stain hiding properties. Applying a pigmented sealer to smoked building surfaces for odor control has become a routine practice in the restoration industry. It is important to note that the most effective application occurs once the surface has been cleaned thoroughly.

Surface preparation is an important aspect and all of the sealer brands carry detailed instructions on how to prepare the surface. Kilz for example, specifies “the surface must be clean, free of dust, grease, wax, peeling paint, mold, mildew, and wallpaper paste. If washing is necessary, use a non-soapy detergent or Tri-Sodium Phosphate substitute. Rinse well and allow to dry completely.” After a fire, combustion particles settle and adhere to surfaces through a variety of mechanisms. In the immediate after-math of a fire they exist primarily as surface contaminants. Gross accumulations can be removed by HEPA vacuuming with a brush attachment or wiping. Cellular rubber sponges (Chem Sponges) capture additional settled fire particles that a HEPA vacuum may not pick up.

Application of the sealer is just as important to ensure that odors are fully blocked. The sealer should form an unbroken membrane over the target surface. Spray application is the most frequent method and is typically done with an airless sprayer. Sometimes individual spray cans are used to get to hard to reach areas. Proper spray application requires skill and experience, as every surface has some degree of irregularity. If the sprayer is not held perpendicular across the surface, a shadowing effect is possible.

The cleanup and deodorization after a fire can be a complicated task and the use of primers and sealers is only a small piece of the puzzle. The full fire restoration process includes the following techniques: dry wiping, wet wiping, the use of odor counteractants and neutralizers, thermal fogging, dry fogging, and the use of Ozone. This article is intended to give you an overview of one piece of the fire restoration process. If you are to experience a fire, it is important to call upon an experienced and licensed restoration contractor to get your property back to its pre-loss condition. Until next time my friends, be prepared and stay safe.

March 2016

Events

March 1-3: TASBO Conference-Dallas
 March 3: SAMA Luncheon
 March 3: ACA Luncheon
 March 3: IREM Luncheon
 March 8: CIA Luncheon
 March 9: AAFAME Luncheon
 March 9: SA BOMA Luncheon
 March 16: IIASA Luncheon
 March 17: Austin BOMA Luncheon
 March 23: SAABE Luncheon

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 -----TASBO Dallas	2 Conference-----	3 SAMA Lunch ACA Luncheon IREM Luncheon	4	5
6	7	8 CAI Luncheon	9 SABOMA Luncheon AAFAME Luncheon	10	11	12
13	14	15	16 IIASA Luncheon	17 Austin BOMA	18	19
20	21	22	23 SAABE Luncheon	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

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