



Preparing Fiberglass/Gelcoat Pools

Introduction

Before beginning any coating or re-coating job it's important to understand what type of pool is being painted, the importance of surface preparation and why certain products work while others do not. After all, the purpose of coating a pool aside from being eye pleasing, is also to protect the substrate from the harsh conditions of the pool water and the effects of prolonged immersion. Realistically, a pool coating is not meant to last forever but if the job is done correctly, it will prolong the longevity and durability of the coating. Maintenance of the pool will also affect the lifespan of the coating. This bulletin will address the preparation of fiberglass pools.

Bare Fiberglass/Gelcoat

To be effective, any coating must adhere well to the substrate (fiberglass or gelcoat) in order to prevent moisture from reaching it. Therefore, the first step is to examine the condition of the substrate. If the substrate is in good condition with very minor hairline/spider cracks then proceed to power washing and prepping. Power washing with a 3500 psi removes any loose material from the surface.

If the fiberglass substrate is heavily cracked or bulging then it must be repaired before proceeding to anything else. Once all repairs have been made and the substrate has been restored, then proceed to clean the surface to remove contaminants present. Contaminants are referred to as dirt, oils, scale, delaminating paint and secretions that have stuck to the walls and floor of the pool or slide. Failure to properly remove all contaminants will affect the coating's performance and lifespan. The best way to remove contaminants is to use a cleaning agent such as Tri-Sodium Phosphate (TSP) or a cleaning solution recommended by the paint manufacturer, such as Ramuc Clean and Prep Solution.

The fiberglass surface should be sanded with 60-80 grit sandpaper for a good surface profile. Use of any higher grit sandpaper will only "polish" the surface. Sand in the same direction all the time, parallel sanding grooves hold paint better than cross-hatch or sanding in all directions¹. Once the surface has been sanded it must be washed with TSP and rinsed or wiped with a clean tac rag. Afterward it should be left to dry and a condensation test should be performed prior to applying the paint.

Painting Bare Fiberglass

Epoxy based coatings are best suitable for bare fiberglass surfaces.

Previously Painted Fiberglass

For previously painted surfaces the first step is to assess the condition of the paint system.

- If it's in sound condition and the composition is known, proceed to power washing, prepping and then recoating with the same type of paint. Prepping should be done according to the type of paint present. Existing acrylic emulsion, chlorinated rubber and synthetic rubber coatings can be prepped via TSP and muriatic acid or Ramuc Clean and Prep (both methods described above). However, if the old coating is glossy, chalking, cracking, or blistering (minimally) then sanding with 60 or 80 grit sandpaper is recommended to prevent failure.
- Epoxy coatings should be sanded as the film that is formed by these is very tough and hard. Muriatic acid can be used, but a good surface profile is not always attainable nor guaranteed. Therefore, sanding is more suitable for surface profiling an epoxy surface. The surface must still be cleaned and decontaminated with TSP to remove any residual chalk.
- If, on the other hand the current paint system is not in good condition then the surface will have to be stripped down to the bare substrate.
- If the composition is unknown it must be determined as not all coatings are compatible with one another. Ramuc offers a Chip Analysis service at no cost to the customer. Details on where to send your pool chips can be found in Ramuc's website www.ramucpoolpaint.com. Once the composition is known then proceed to prepping and recoating as described above.
- Perform a condensation test prior to paint application.

Condensation Test

The pool surface must be completely dry prior to painting. Tape 2'x2' pieces of clear plastic to the shallow end floor, deep end floor, and deep end wall in the shade. Wait 4 hours. Any condensation? Remove the plastic and perform the test again in 24 hours. When no condensation occurs, the surface is ready to paint!

Sources:

1. Garcia, Mark (2016, January 5). Painting of Fiberglass Pools. [Pool Blog]
<http://blog.poolcenter.com>

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