

Cleaning methods for stainless steel

Stainless steel is easy to clean. Washing with soap or mild detergent and warm water followed by a clear water rinse is usually quite adequate for domestic and architectural equipment. Where stainless steel has become extremely dirty with signs of surface discolouration (perhaps following periods of neglect, or misuse) alternative methods of cleaning can be used, as outlined below.

Requirement	Suggested Method ^{1,2}	Comments
Routine cleaning of light soiling	Soap, detergent or dilute (1%) ammonia solution in warm clean water. Apply with a clean sponge, soft cloth or soft-fibrebrush then rinse in clean water and dry ⁶	Satisfactory on most surfaces
Fingerprints	Detergent and warm water, alternatively, hydrocarbon solvent	Proprietary spray-applied polishes available to clean and minimise remarking
Oil and grease marks	Hydrocarbon solvents (methylated spirit, isopropyl alcohol or acetone) ²	Alkaline formulations are also available with surfactant additions e.g. 'D7' Polish ¹
Stubborn spots, stains and light discolouration. Water marking. Light rust staining	Mild, non-scratching creams and polishes. Apply with soft cloth or soft sponge and rinse off residues with clean water and dry ^{6,7} .	Avoid cleaning pastes with abrasive additions ³ . Suitable cream cleansers are available with soft calcium carbonate additions, e.g. 'Jif', or with the addition of citric acid, e.g. Shiny Sinks ¹ . Do not use chloride solutions ^{8,9} .
Localised rust stains caused by carbon steel contamination	Proprietary gels, or 10% phosphoric acid solution (followed by ammonia and water rinses), or oxalic acid solution (followed by water rinse). ⁶	Small areas may be treated with a rubbing block comprising fine abrasive in a hard rubber or plastic filler. Carbon steel wool should not be used, nor should pads that have previously been used on carbon steel. A test should be carried out to ensure that the original surface finish is not damaged.
Burnt on food or carbon deposits	Pre-soak in hot water with detergent or ammonia solution. Remove deposits with nylon brush and fine scouring powder if necessary. Repeat if necessary and finish with 'routine cleaning'.	Abrasive scouring powder can leave scratch marks on polished surfaces.
Tannin (tea) stains and oily deposits in coffee urns	Tannin stains - soak in a hot solution of washing soda i.e. sodium carbonate. Coffee deposits - soak in a hot solution of baking soda (sodium bicarbonate).	These solutions can also be applied with a soft cloth or sponge. Rinse with clean water. Satisfactory on most surfaces.
Adherent hard water scales and mortar/cement splashes	10-15 volume % solution of phosphoric acid. Use warm, neutralise with dilute ammonia solution, rinse with clean water and dry ⁶ . Alternatively soak in a 25% vinegar solution and use a nylon brush to remove deposits.	Proprietary formulations available with surfactant additions. Take special care when using hydrochloric acid based mortar removers ^{8,9} .
Heating or heavy discolouration	a) Non-scratching cream or polish e.g. Solvol Auto Chrome Metal Polish ^{1,9} b) Nylon-type pad, e.g. 'Scotchbrite' ^{3,4,5}	a) Creams are suitable for most finishes, but only use 'Solvol' on bright polished surfaces. Some slight scratching can be left. b) Use on brushed and polished finishes along the grain.
Badly neglected surfaces with accumulated grime deposits	A fine, abrasive paste as used for car body refinishing, e.g. 'T-cut' rinsed clean to remove all paste material and dried ¹ .	May brighten dull finishes. To avoid a patchy appearance, the whole surface may need to be treated.
Paint, graffiti	Proprietary alkaline or solvent paint strippers, depending upon paint type. Use soft nylon or bristle brush on patterned surfaces.	Apply as directed by manufacturer.

Notes

1. The products referenced in this information sheet are understood to be suitable for stainless steels. However, no endorsement of the products or their manufacturers is implied and it is acknowledged that other manufacturing companies may provide products of equal or better quality. The following companies manufacture proprietary names mentioned: - 'Jif' - Lever Brothers Ltd, 'Shiny Sinks' - Home Products Ltd, 'Ajax' - Colgate Palmolive Ltd, 'D7 Stainless Steel Polish' - Diversey Ltd, 'T-Cut' - Automotive Chemicals Ltd and 'Solvol Auto Chrome Metal Polish' - Hammerite Products Ltd
2. Cleaning agents should be approved for use under the relevant national environmental regulations and, in addition, prepared and used in accordance with the manufacturers or suppliers' health & safety instructions. Solvents should not be used in enclosed areas.
3. Nylon abrasive pads should be adequate for dealing with most deposits. If a more severe treatment is needed to mask coarse scratches or physical damage on a surface, use the finest abrasive medium consistent with covering the damage marks. With directional brushed and polished finishes, align and blend the new "scratch pattern" with the original finish, checking that the resulting finish is aesthetically acceptable. Silicon carbide media may be used, especially for the final stages of finishing. Avoid using hard objects such as knife blades and certain abrasive/souring agents as it is possible to introduce surface scuffs and scratches. Scratching is particularly noticeable on sink drainer areas. These are usually superficial and can be removed with proprietary stainless steel cleaners or, alternatively, with a car paint restorer, such as 'T-cut'.
4. If wire brushes are used, these should be made of a similar or better grade of stainless steel. **Ensure that all abrasive media used are free from sources of contamination, especially iron and chlorides.**
5. When cleaning a surface with any chemical preparation or abrasive medium, a trial should be done on a small, unobtrusive hidden or non-critical area of the surface, to check that the resulting finish matches with the original.
6. To avoid water marks, use clean rinsing water, such as reasonable quality potable (tap) water. Drying marks may be avoided using an air blower or wiping with clean disposable wipes.
7. Rust marks or staining on stainless steels is unlikely to be the result of corrosion to the stainless steel itself (similar marks may also be found on porcelain and plastic sinks). These marks are likely to result from small particles of carbon steel from wire wool

Care and maintenance of stainless steel

Introduction

Stainless steels are selected for applications where their inherent corrosion resistance, strength and aesthetic appeal are required. However, dependent on the service conditions, stainless steels will stain and discolour due to surface deposits and so cannot be assumed to be completely maintenance-free. In order to achieve maximum corrosion resistance and aesthetic appeal, the surface of the stainless steel must be kept clean. Provided the grade of stainless steel and the surface finish are correctly selected, and cleaning schedules carried out on a regular basis, good performance and long service life will result.

Factors affecting maintenance

Surface contamination and the formation of deposits on the surface of the stainless steel must be prevented. These deposits may be minute particles of iron or rust generated during construction. Industrial and even naturally occurring atmospheric conditions can produce deposits which can be equally corrosive, e.g. salt deposits from marine conditions.

Working environments can also provide aggressive conditions such as heat and humidity in swimming pool buildings. These conditions can result in surface discolouration of stainless steels and so maintenance on a more frequent basis may be required.

Modern processes use many cleaners, sterilizers and bleaches for hygienic purposes. Proprietary solutions, when used in accordance with makers' instructions, should be safe but if used incorrectly (e.g. warm or concentrated), may cause discolouration or corrosion on stainless steels. Strong acid solutions are sometimes used to clean masonry and tiling of buildings. These acids should never be used where contact with metals, including stainless steel, is possible. If this happens, the acid solution must be removed immediately, followed by dilution and rinsing with clean water.

Maintenance programme

With care taken during fabrication and installation, cleaning before 'hand-over' should not present any problems. More attention may be required if the installation period has been prolonged or hand-over delayed. Where surface contamination is suspected, immediate cleaning after site fixing should avoid problems later. Food handling, pharmaceutical, aerospace and certain nuclear applications may require extremely high levels of cleanliness applicable to each industry.

The frequency of cleaning is dependent on the application - a simple rule is:

Clean the metal when it is dirty in order to restore its original appearance.

This may vary from once to four times a year for external applications, but may be daily for items in 'hygienic' applications. Recommendations on cleaning frequencies in architectural applications are shown below.

Cleaning frequency in architectural applications

Location	430 (1.4016)	304 (1.4301)	316 (1.4401)
Internal	As required to maintain appearance or design		
Suburban or rural	6-12 month intervals (as appropriate to location and design)		
Industrial or urban	Grade not recommended	3-6 months	6-12 months
Coastal or marine	Grade not recommended	Grade not recommended	6-12 months