

## Cleaning Tent Vinyl

Our experience and observations over the last 25 years have shown that three cleaning methods will handle the washing of most tent products. As you proceed, you will need to decide which method best suits your workspace and climate conditions.

### Hand Washing and Mopping

Hand washing is used for small tent parts to a completely large tent. Select the appropriate "vinyl safe" cleaner (such as Tent Wash 101) and be sure to follow the dilutions rates recommended by the manufacturer. Too much of cleaning concentrates may harm fabrics, so don't over soap. The following tips will help you in hand washing operations.

Lay the tent on a clean, flat and stable surface.

Smaller pieces - your rental tables set together will make a large work space and a convenient height for this job.

Larger pieces - the floor work better but if the surface is not smooth, lay down a piece of used astro turf. Rinse the turf periodically to get rid of accumulated soap and dirt.

Spray on/Wipe off technique works best with terry cloth towels.

#### **WASHING & SCRUBBING TOOLS**

- Spray Bottles
- Wash Mitts or Rags
- Mop and Pail
- Soft Bristle Brush
- Terry Cloth Towels

#### **LOCAL SOURCES**

- Make a deal with local commercial laundries to get or buy worn out towels.
- Ask your local high school sports programs. They wear out a large number of towels and always need help discarding them.

Mopping works better than the spray on/wipe off because water and cleaning chemicals stay set on the tent longer, which gives the wetting agents a chance to lift more dirt. Good agitation with a mop or soft bristle brush improves the results. Mop with clear water before drying.

Hang tent and tent parts near the ceiling to get the best drying time. Not only is it the warmest spot in the room but an unlikely space you are using. Pulleys attached at the ceiling with ropes through them work well for pulling up fabric. For smaller pieces, use a bar or pipe between ropes and drape the fabric over the bar, pulling up to the ceiling.

### WASHING MACHINES

Many party stores now use large machines (120lbs) to wash vinyl tents. Machine agitation effectively washes the fabric, but here are some precautionary steps.

1. Do not over soap. Pre-spot stubborn stains and grime in advance with a vinyl safe spotting solution.
2. Most large machines will hold up to a 20' x 40' canopy tent top or a 20' section of a 40' wide pole tent.
3. Ideally, larger tent should have detachable guy ropes so the ropes will not tangle during washing and take longer to dry than the rest of the tent.
4. Wash ropes separately from the tent tops. Ropes are generally dirtier than the tops and should be handled on a different cycle. Another idea is to put them in wash bags to prevent tangling.

## **POWER WASHING AND SCRUBBING**

Power Washing is often used on larger tents. Be sure the tent part is laying flat on a well-supported surface that can be cleaned in the "rinse off" cycle of the operation. Keeping the "wash pad" clean and clear of foreign objects, like rocks, will keep you from poking holes in your tent parts.

- Find a suitable clear surface of concrete or asphalt big enough to layout tent section. If not available, build a pad with a typical wood construction system and then cover it with old vinyl tent parts. If you have a choice make or pick the wash pad to have a slope, 3" – 10' works best.
- Lay tent sections and rinse thoroughly to loosen dirt. Remove large objects from surface.
- Pre-spot stubborn stains, oils and tars with vinyl safe spot cleaning treatments
- Apply soap to vinyl and scrub with brush or power agitation. Pay close attention to areas under valance and flaps that hold dirt, which promotes the growth of mold and mildew.
- Rinse vinyl thoroughly to remove all soap and dirt from tent surface.
- If power washers are used, be sure the pressure is very low, 100lbs. should be maximum
- Tent section must hang until completely dry. NOTE: Make sure all lace and areas underneath valances and rain flaps are totally dry before folding and storing.
- Because tent sections are so large, now is the time to inspect for damage repair or patch if possible, finally, tag the piece noting condition or work needed. This saves a lot of time later.
- Fold "accordion style", making it ready for it next layout, put in bag or container for protection.
- Store in a cool, dry place until next use.

## **DO'S AND DON'TS**

### **DO.....**

- Wash regularly, mostly by hand, wiping or light scrubbing, only completely immerse (machine or power washing) when dirty condition warrants.
- Use chemicals and soaps that have been pre-tested or "vinyl safe".
- Use terry cloth towels for wiping.
- Rinse any strong cleaner from vinyl with clear water as soon as possible.
- Dry as completely as possible before folding.
- Store in bags or containers to prevent damage.

### **DON'T.....**

- Drag vinyl tent parts on any surface. Vinyl abrades easily but it is not noticeable. If tent parts need to be skidded or moved, roll it onto a drop cloth or old piece of carpet then slide as necessary.
- Use household and bath cleaners such as Formula 409, Simple Green...most will harm vinyl and shorten their life.
- Use petrol-chemical solvents to remove stains, most solvents attack vinyl tent materials.
- Use abrasives or stiff bristle brushes.
- Hang tents where wind can flap or beat the fabric, this will cause "wind wipe" marks, or cracking in many vinyls.
- Fold tents with wet ropes.

## **HOLDING YOU OWN – The "margin" with dirty or tent vinyl tops**

### **Worst Case Scenario (Wet Climates)**

- Wet but Dirty: Store in the coolest place possible, but do not let freeze
- Wet but Clean: Store in a cool place until room is ready for drying
- Dry but Dirty: keep dry until ready for washing

### **Worst Case Scenario (Dry Climates)**

- Dirty with Heavy Dust: Fold and handle carefully, not to abrade fabric. Keep dry
- Clean but Wet: Be sure not to let set in sun with water on vinyl
- Dry and Clean: Get to cool storage area, out of the sun immediately

## EXTREME DAMAGE

Any of the above plus food or sugared items (cola, cake, fruit juices) will immediately grow and set stains into the scrim of the vinyl tent that cannot be removed. Wash as soon as possible, even if it is on overtime schedule, Before washing apply Spotter 86i to help remove stain.

Tents that are set-up around a major airport are susceptible to damage from being under the direct flight path of airplanes. Hot jet fuel from over flight on landing or take-offs will eat into many vinyl fabrics and cause short life or discoloration of the tent material

## COST SAVING TIPS

- After washing cycle, before storage, use condition tags to record any needed repair and evaluate quality and usability. Of course a "ready for use" or "party quality" tag is best
- When storing tents make every effort to keep the humidity as low as possible inside the warehouse. If you wash in the same room as storage, use fans to circulate air and a dehumidifier to remove moisture
- If a lift truck/pallet jack system is used for storing and handling tents, cover all wood pallets with old astro-turf. Wood pallets tend to grab and poke tents very easily.
- Store as low in the room as practical, heat builds near the roof.
- "Plastisol Migration", the disease of the vinyl tent generally happens some time in its life span. Good care, proper washing and regular use is the best deterrent to this disease starting in your tents. Signs that the fabric are deteriorating are:
  - Sticky surface even after washing
  - Crackling sound when unfolding after a long period in the bag
  - Top surface discolored or an oxidized look
  - Smells bad, like rotten egg smell

When any of these signs appear, plan to replace your top as soon as possible. The disease "Plastisol Migration" is irreversible and will only worsen with time.