

Skin Is No Match for a Pressure Washer

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Everyone who lives in central Florida for any length of time can tell you about the mildew and mold that grows on decks and patios seemingly overnight. The damp weather, combined with the shade of oak trees, create an environment ideal for microorganisms to flourish. With this reality comes the question of how to deal with the annoying and unsightly mildew and mold.

Do homeowners accept the condition as part of life in Florida, or do they take control of the situation by using a pressure cleaner to remove the discoloration? My father chose the latter and rented a gas-powered pressure cleaner from a local hardware store.

After filling the machine with gas and mixing a spray solution of bleach and water, he was ready to go. The job started easily enough. The mildew was coming off the patio deck without a problem. It looked as if we would be done in an hour or two, but that was before my father's typical overconfidence got involved. He decided he wanted to clean the pool equipment, too. We had the machine for the whole day, so why not use it for all those odd jobs around the yard?

Holding a pool broom in his left hand, Dad managed to pull the cleaner-spray wand back far enough to spray the broom. He quickly cleaned up another piece of equipment, then started on the last piece—a pool vacuum. He missed his mark with the wand, however, and shot his hand with the high-pressure bleach and water solution.

I heard him yell and went to see how badly he was hurt. I was surprised to see only a small cut, but closer examination revealed the wound was about two inches long and extended deeply into his hand. Because of all the bleach solution that had gotten injected into his hand, the palm swelled and became discolored.

My father, of course, wasn't going to a doctor. "What's he going to do?" was his



response. "He can't fix it." I think it was a combination of pride and embarrassment that kept him from going. He simply cleaned up his hand as best he could, then sat down and watched as I finished cleaning the deck.

When morning came the next day, my father awoke to considerable pain and a hand that had grown to twice its normal size. The overdue trip to the doctor soon followed. His hand was infected, and it took antibiotics to reduce the swelling and pain. He recovered fully and now tells the story with a bit of embellishment and a smile that only hindsight allows.

Several lessons were learned from this incident:

- Use the correct tool for a job. High-pressure washers are very effective at cleaning decks and outside walls, but they do not work well on small, loose objects. Although many tools work for a variety of jobs, some are designed for specific tasks and should be used only for those tasks.

- Don't underestimate a doctor's care. When you're injured, a trip to a hospital isn't always necessary. Many times, a small bandage will do the job. When you have a serious accident, though, don't hesitate to see a doctor. Don't let machismo and pride get in the way of good judgment; in this case, they made my father's situation worse. There is no reward for toughing it out.

- Sometimes, it's better to hire someone to do your work while you enjoy a cold drink on a patio chair. ■