

A HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO EFFLORESCENCE

You've made a wise investment by choosing natural stone for your home or landscape and, now that the project is complete, you're eager to start enjoying it. Gradually, though, you notice that some of the stones seem to be turning white. These white deposits are called efflorescence - an annoying but temporary phenomena that occurs naturally in many building products. Here's what you need to know about efflorescence and why there's no cause for alarm.

What is Efflorescence?

Efflorescence is a white, chalky substance that may temporarily appear on the surface of natural stone and other building materials. Naturally-occurring salts found in soil, water, sand, gravel and cement are dissolved by rain and groundwater. This moisture is drawn to the surface of the stone where it evaporates, leaving the salts behind as a white haze. It is a naturally occurring process that happens with many porous building materials, including stone, clay brick and concrete pavers. Although unattractive, it is temporary and in no way damages the stone.

Can Efflorescence be Prevented?

It is not possible to predict with absolute certainty whether efflorescence will occur or not. Some types of stone and certain site conditions may be more susceptible to efflorescence than others. A professional installer can often take steps during construction to minimize the possibility of efflorescence appearing. This possibility cannot be completely eradicated, however, and despite your contractor's best efforts, efflorescence may still occur.

Note: The opportunity for efflorescence exists with all types of stone and, indeed, most manufactured alternatives. Porous stones, which may be more likely than others to effloresce, create beautiful, long-lasting projects and need not be avoided. Efflorescence, when it occurs, is temporary and should not be a determining factor when choosing stone.



Efflorescence appears as a powdery, white haze on many building materials.



Efflorescence can occur in both horizontal and vertical applications.

How to Clean Efflorescence off Natural Stone

In all but very extreme cases, efflorescence will stop as the capillaries (pores) in the stone become blocked by crystallized salts. Once the process stops, the white deposits will eventually wear off with use and weather exposure. For homeowners who are in a hurry to remove it, water and a stiff-bristled brush will often do the trick. However, if the process of efflorescing has not stopped or the factors causing it are still present, the haze will return and will need to be cleaned again.

In particularly stubborn cases, efflorescence can be removed with an efflorescence cleaner. A word of caution when using chemical cleaners, however. Use only cleaners that are specially formulated for natural stone. Use them only as directed and test them in an inconspicuous area first. We do not recommend chemical cleaners for natural stone except as a last resort. In most cases, a little time and patience is all that is needed and, before long, your project will return to its original beauty.

We work with many award-winning landscapers and masons in southern Ontario. Contact us if you need help finding a professional installer for your natural stone project.