

THE PROPER METHOD TO CLEAN A GRAVESTONE

The first and last rule when cleaning a gravestone is — DO NO HARM. Too many times, damage is done by those with good intentions. This is why it is important to educate oneself before attempting to clean any headstone.

It is of utmost importance to know which cleansing agent to use. All knowledgeable conservators across the country use and recommend one product only — D/2 Biological Solution. This non-toxic cleanser is a biodegradable, neutral quaternary ammonium solution that contains surfactants. The National Cemetery Association (within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) entered into an agreement with the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, National Park Service (within the U.S. Department of the Interior) to evaluate cleaners in an effort to minimize damage to historic headstones. Their conclusion of D/2 was reached after a 3-phase, seven-year study. The National Cemetery Association was previously using a solution that was discoloring and damaging the headstones over a period of time. Millions of dollars of expense were occurring in ongoing replacement of damaged headstones in the National Cemeteries. D/2 has since been used exclusively in Arlington National Cemetery, on the Washington Monument, the White House, and even on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. It is also used by museums throughout the country, and in many other applications including for awnings and on wood.

The following pages explain the proper procedure to follow in cleaning any gravestone. This applies to all types of stone, be it fieldstone, sandstone, limestone, marble, granite, etc. The 'softer', older, or more fragile the stone is, less pressure should be exerted on it - brush carefully. Following the procedures is a page that discusses the proper tools to use and in putting together a 'cleaning kit'. There is also a list of other items to consider that may help to make your cleaning experience a more enjoyable one.

If after reading this you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to contact me at my email address that is listed at the end of the section titled 'Items For A Cleaning Kit'.

I wish to express my appreciation for your willingness to help care for our ancestors monuments, the cemeteries, and thus, our very history. Thank you!

Sincerely, Bob Young

Gravestone Conservator, Cemetery Administrator, and Volunteer

GRAVESTONE CLEANING PROCEDURE

- 1) SAFETY FIRST: Check and test the monument for stability. If it is loose and unstable in the least, skip it for now and move on to another one to clean. [Notify the responsible party of the situation. This may be a family member, a caretaker, or the specific association set up for the administration of that particular cemetery.]
- 2) If secure, then rinse it thoroughly with water. Always keep the stone wet during cleaning. Use a plastic or wood scraper to remove any accumulations of biologicals on the surface. You can use 'chopsticks', small paintbrush plastic handles, or the like, to clean out the lettering.
- 3) *Rinse thoroughly with water always from the top downward.*
- 4) Spray with D/2 Biological Solution and let it stand for 15 minutes or so. Do not spray the D/2 so any breeze might blow it back in your face. (SEE THE BACK, OR THE NEXT PAGE FOR ITEMS NEEDED FOR A CLEANING KIT AND OTHER ITEMS TO CONSIDER.) TIP: During the 'waiting' period, move on to another gravestone or two, and start on them by completing steps 1 thru 5 above, then go back to the first one to complete steps 6 thru 9.
- 5) Take a plastic bristle brush and scrub as needed to further clean the stone. Do so from the bottom upward.
- 6) Rinse thoroughly with water - again from the top downward.
- 7) If there are any areas that require extra scrubbing or attention, do so as needed.
- 8) After a final, thorough rinsing (either step 7 or 9), spray the gravestone completely with D/2 and you're finished. The D/2 will continue working on the stone for weeks. It will seep into the 'pores' of the stone and continue to eliminate biologicals that have migrated under the surface of the stone. It will continue this process until eventually, it will be rinsed off by rain.

NOTES

- A) Many times, the stonework will take on an orangeish color as the D/2 interacts with the biologicals on the stone. This coloration will go away within a couple of weeks or so.
- B) If you wish to not go through the entire process listed above, you may just spray the gravestone thoroughly *with D/2 and leave. Come back in 3 or 4 weeks and do it again. Repeat as many times as is necessary to get the desired results.* By following the procedure listed at the top of the page, you speed up the cleansing process substantially and can obtain immediate results. NEVER use metal in the cleaning process! This would include wire brushes, as well as metal scrapers, etc.
- C) Other "approved" biocidal cleaners include 'Enviro Klean' and 'BioWash'. There are a couple of others also. It is NOT recommended to use 'Wet & Forget', any "homemade formulas" found on the internet, bleaches of any type, and/or household cleaners such as '409', 'Comet', 'Soft Scrub', or the like. Be aware that marble gravestones will be permanently stained yellow if bleach is used on them.
- D) Black mold on marble can become extremely hardened. It will resemble black enamel paint, and it is best NOT to try and remove it, as doing so may well damage the stone.
- E) For more information about D/2, go to their website: www.d2bio.com Also, for videos of the process, go to YouTube and check for "Cleaning of Gravestones".

NOTE: WCCPG uses, recommends, and promotes D/2 Biological Solution. It is a pH neutral quaternary ammonium solution with surfactants to carry surface contaminants away. WCCPG stocks and sells D/2. See the back, or next page for details. (Rev. 4/23)