

Cleaning Plaques

A metals corrosion specialist and the bronze firm that manufactures ASCE's plaques were consulted about plaque corrosion and cleaning. The following method was suggested as an easy, effective way to clean plaques.

Please note that the bronze metal is very soft. Do not use electric-powered sanding equipment, as you may quickly sand off the lettering!

1. Mask off the area around the outside beveled edge of the plaque. For example, if the plaque is mounted on a wall, mask off the wall area around the perimeter of the plaque using masking tape and plain paper (not newsprint).
2. Using lacquer thinner, saturate the plaque surface using a soft cloth. This removes not only the corrosion, but also the brown background. Continue this until the bare metal is exposed.
3. Using a soft emery cloth wrapped on a sanding block (remove the sandpaper!), rub left to right by hand only on the surface of the plaque and on the beveled edge as well. **Do not rub too hard, as the bronze is very soft!**
4. Mask off the beveled edge of the plaque using masking tape.
5. Obtain dark brown "Rust-Oleum" or any other high-quality outdoor lacquer in a spray can. Spray paint the surface of the plaque, including the lettering. Be careful not to get too heavy a coat of lacquer on the surface. Allow to dry thoroughly.
6. Using a soft cloth and lacquer thinner, gently rub the lettering again to remove the brown lacquer from the raised surface of the lettering. Be careful not to get the thinner on the background.
7. Remove masking from beveled edge only and clean any brown lacquer that may have accidentally leached onto the beveled edge.
8. Obtain clear "Rust-Oleum" or any other high quality, clear outdoor lacquer. Spray one coat on the entire plaque. Allow to dry, and then spray on a second coat. Allow to dry.
9. Remove masking from area surrounding the plaque.

If you have any questions, please contact the Staff Liaison for the History and Heritage Committee at 703.295.6240.