

Diagnosing and Correcting Paint Flashing

Uneven sheen, visible repairs, and cut-in bands: three SPATE-led approaches to a consistent finish.

By Joshua Christopher | Version 1.0 | October 1, 2026

Identify the surface and coating, determine whether the defect is physical or visual, and correct the cause before repainting. **My standard:** Match the repaired surface to its surroundings, then coat the whole wall from corner to corner. Judge the result after it dries, from different angles and under changing light.

1. Start with the SPATE checks

Flashing is an uneven appearance in the sheen of a painted surface. People looking for a solution may describe what they see as "uneven paint," a "blotchy finish," "streaks," or "lines." Those descriptions help identify the concern, but they are not all definitions of flashing. A patch may look dull, a band may look shinier, or the difference may become obvious only when viewed at an angle. A visible color difference or a raised application line can also resemble flashing; check both color and reflection, and feel for physical ridges, before deciding on the correction.

Field practice

I begin with our [SPATE framework](#). First, identify the substrate. Then identify the product on it and look at how the finish was applied. I want to know whether I am dealing with uneven coating, a repair that does not match the wall, or an application problem that becomes visible in the light.

SPATE check	What to establish
S / Substrate	Material, existing finish, texture, soundness, and any repaired areas.
P / Product	Paint type, color, sheen, compatibility, and the selected product's application limits.
A / Application	How paint will be distributed evenly while maintaining a wet edge.
T / Tools	Suitable abrasives, inspection light, roller cover, and spray equipment if used.
E / Execution	Preparation sequence, conditions, drying, and inspection at each step.

Manufacturer direction

Sherwin-Williams identifies several possible causes of uneven gloss, including differences in porosity or film thickness, insufficient film build, and temperature or moisture changes during drying. Its guidance includes priming porous areas and applying an additional finish coat where appropriate. [1]

Uneven sheen can have several causes. Inspect the surface before deciding how to correct it.

These examples concern appearance defects on otherwise sound surfaces. If inspection finds [peeling](#), loss of [adhesion](#), water damage, or another failing condition, address that problem before applying these corrective coats. See [Repainting Previously Painted Interior Walls](#) and [Choosing the Right Primer](#).

Official safety guidance

Before sanding old paint, establish whether lead may be present. EPA advises checking pre-1978 homes and using lead-safe practices; uncontrolled sanding can spread hazardous dust. This guide's grit choices do not replace the required assessment, containment, or protective measures. [9]

2. Vinyl siding: identify the finish and prepare the wall

Field practice

In this example, the vinyl siding is relatively new, in good condition, and has no repairs. The existing coating has been identified as exterior acrylic paint in a satin sheen. We have found flashing and uneven spray application. An unsuitable tip or spraying too close are possibilities to investigate, rather than conclusions to draw from appearance alone.

My usual preference on this surface is a good exterior acrylic in satin for washability. If the owner likes the existing color, I arrange a match. Leftover original paint and its label help. When possible, I return to the same store that supplied it because tinting can vary between locations. That improves our starting point; it does not guarantee an exact match.

Manufacturer direction

Sherwin-Williams' vinyl-siding guide calls for checking the siding manufacturer's requirements and choosing a suitable coating and color. Its guidance limits the color to one no darker than the original vinyl unless using the specified VinylSafe options. The original vinyl color is not necessarily the color of a later repaint. A match to existing paint alone does not establish that the tint formula is suitable for vinyl. The guide also calls for cleaning, rinsing, and drying before coating. [2]

If the sound coating has flashing alone, cleaning may be all the preparation needed. If there are raised spray lines as well, those lines need attention so the next coat goes over an even surface.

Field practice

For raised paint lines, I use 120-220 grit depending on their severity. In my experience, exterior acrylic generally covers scratches from these medium grits. Coarser than 120 is usually too aggressive for this correction, while finer than 220 often does not remove the raised paint efficiently enough.

Work on the raised coating, without cutting into or flattening the siding's own texture. Test a small area and check that the chosen finish will hide the sanding pattern. Remove sanding residue before coating. If preparation exposes a different underlying surface, reassess its preparation and primer requirements instead of treating it as the original sound paint.

The two photographs accompanying this example were supplied as examples of flashing on vinyl siding. They show the appearance defect, not a completed correction or a proven application cause.



Flashing on painted vinyl siding. Lighter, patchy bands interrupt the appearance of the dark finish.

3. Vinyl siding: apply one consistent corrective coat

Field practice

I would either spray and [back-roll](#) or roll the entire wall. For this correction, I like a woven cover with a 1/2-3/4-inch nap. On a sound, recently painted wall, I expect one full, even corrective coat to be enough, but the dried inspection decides whether we need another.

This nap choice belongs to this siding example. Select the cover for the actual texture and desired finish; the shared reference is [Selecting Brushes and Roller Covers](#). Use [Airless Spraying](#) for masking, setup, tip selection, and application technique.

Manufacturer direction

Sherwin-Williams permits brush, roller, or spray application in its vinyl guide. Back-rolling is my preferred correction here; its absence alone does not prove the earlier job was wrong. Follow the selected coating's required preparation, coat count, spreading rate, film thickness, and recoat interval. Existing paint does not authorize an excessively heavy corrective coat. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

Keep the application consistent across the whole wall, maintaining the wet edge and working to natural breaks. If spraying and back-rolling, work the coating while it is still wet.

Field practice

If heat is making the wall dry too quickly to maintain a wet edge, I prefer to work early, before the sun heats it. Floetrol can give me more working time in a compatible paint. Extending the drying time is the reason I would add it in this situation.

Manufacturer direction

Sherwin-Williams advises avoiding direct sun, checking application temperatures against the paint label, and working on a dry surface. An early start is useful only after dew has cleared and the actual surface, air, and material conditions are acceptable. An additive does not make an overheated or damp wall suitable for painting. [3]

See Section 8 for the additive checks before using Floetrol.

4. Vinyl siding: inspect after drying and as the light changes

Field practice

I wait for the coating to dry and inspect the wall from different angles. I also look at it at different times of day. A wall may look fine at first, then show flashing several hours later when the sun has moved and the reflection changes. If flashing remains in the dried finish, we coat the entire wall again.

Before repeating the coat, reassess the cause: surface variation, application consistency, or conditions may still need correction. Inspect for [holidays](#), raised lines, runs, and uneven sheen. Observe the coating's recoat interval; checking later in the day is a lighting check, not a prescribed drying schedule.

The photograph of the window wall shows why an angled inspection matters. Uneven reflection can stand out across and below the window even when the wall has overall color coverage.



Flashing on painted vinyl siding viewed at an angle. Look at the uneven reflection across the wall around and below the window.

5. Interior repairs: match the height and texture first

Field practice

When a repair flashes on an interior wall, I first run my fingers back and forth across the repair and into the surrounding surface. If the patch stands high, we sand it down. If it sits below the existing wall, we skim it again and then sand it level. Uneven areas must be corrected before moving on.

Match the surrounding finish as well as the height. A smooth patch in a textured wall will remain visually different even if its color is right. Refer to the repair and texture guidance in [Repainting Previously Painted Interior Walls](#).

Field practice

For knockdown and other heavy textures, I prime the leveled repair before matching the texture. This gives the underlying wall coverage before the texture is added. After the texture dries, we prime it again, then apply the finish paint. The aim is to help prevent flashing from the repaired area, including the recessed surface beneath the texture.

The sequence for that field method is:

1. Level the repair and remove sanding dust.
2. Prime the repaired background.
3. Match the surrounding texture over the prepared, ready-to-recoat surface.
4. Allow the texture material to dry as specified.
5. Prime the new texture before the finish coats.

Manufacturer direction

Sherwin-Williams' flashing guidance identifies differing porosity as a possible cause and recommends priming porous areas. The prime-texture-prime sequence above is my field method, not a universal texture-manufacturer instruction. Confirm that the selected repair material, primer, texture, and topcoat form a compatible system, using their specified drying and recoating directions. [1]

For primer selection, use [Choosing the Right Primer](#). The primer must suit the surface it will actually contact.

6. Interior repairs: build the local finish, then repaint the wall

Field practice

The surrounding wall may already have several coats of paint. We give the repair multiple finish coats as needed to match that painted surface before coating the entire wall. I repeat the touch check and inspect from different angles. The repair must match in height, texture, and appearance before we move on.

Observe the coating's drying and recoat requirements between local applications. Avoid building a new ridge at the patch perimeter. Matching the existing finish means achieving a consistent surface; it does not mean guessing how many historical coats are on the wall and copying that number.

Field practice

We paint the whole wall from corner to corner and allow it to dry. Then I bring in a work light for a close inspection. I look for flashing, holidays, pinholes, and an even finish. If it meets the standard, the correction is complete. If it does not, we address what remains, recoat, and inspect again.

Choose the interior roller cover from the shared [brush and roller guide](#), matching the actual texture and finish. This corrective sequence does not change my new-drywall standard: primer followed by two finish coats, as described in [Preparing and Painting New Drywall](#).

7. Cut-in bands: level raised brush marks and roll to the edges

A visible border around the wall can be picture framing or hatbanding. Establish whether it is only a color or sheen difference, or whether there are physical brush ridges to remove.

Manufacturer direction

Sherwin-Williams links picture framing to differences between brushed and rolled film build, loss of a wet edge, and incomplete mixing. Its guidance emphasizes uniform application, narrow cut-in areas, and rolling close to the perimeter. A visible band does not automatically require aggressive sanding. [4]

Field practice

With higher sheens, I commonly see raised brush marks or uneven coating at the cut-in. For those physical defects, I use a sanding block with 120-220 grit. For a large area, I may use a palm sander, keeping it moving so I do not cut through and create a bigger repair.

Remove the sanding dust and inspect by touch and from different angles. Once the surface is even, spot-prime the sanded areas with a compatible primer. Build the local finish to match the surrounding wall, using the repair sequence in Sections 5 and 6 where applicable.

Field practice

For the final corrective coat, we mask the adjacent ceiling and baseboard with a straight tape line and plastic protection. We roll the entire wall, including the previously brushed areas, for an even rolled finish from top to bottom and side to side. We do not brush the final coat in this correction.

I use my main roller right to the taped edge. A mini roller with the same nap length is an option, but it is not my routine choice. If a corner or adjacent surface prevents the main roller from reaching an area, I use the matching-nap mini roller there first. Then I follow with the main roller, from top to bottom, working across the wall while the paint remains workable.

The masking must protect the adjacent surface wherever the roller reaches the edge. Inspect the entire dried wall, including its perimeter; use the checks in Section 6 before calling the correction finished.

8. Floetrol and tape-edge sealing: separate practice from directions

Field practice

I recommend Floetrol for additional working time in the final wall coat when it is compatible with the paint. We mix it thoroughly at the manufacturer's recommended amount. The purpose is to help us maintain the wet edge and apply the finish evenly.

Manufacturer direction

PPG's FLOOD FLOETROL FLD6 sheet describes a water-based paint additive that may extend drying time. It calls for a small compatibility test and thorough mixing, and warns that gloss-paint sheen may be reduced. The available U.S. sheet is dated April 2016. Follow current directions for the actual paint and additive, confirm that the coating manufacturer permits the addition, and evaluate a dried sample for the intended sheen. No universal mixing dose is prescribed here. [5]

The thin caulk seal at the tape edge

Field practice

For my final-coat tape-edge method, we apply a very thin bead of clear, paintable caulk and wipe away excess, leaving a seal against bleed. My example is clear Sherwin-Williams 950A. I paint over that thin seal while it is wet and remove the tape while both paint and caulk are wet, pulling it back at about 45 degrees. Removed tape goes straight into a trash bag or bin so wet paint does not transfer to people or nearby surfaces.

Manufacturer direction

The reviewed Sherwin-Williams 950A sheet specifies two hours of drying before painting at 75 F and 50% relative humidity, with longer drying in cool or humid conditions. It also specifies removing masking after tooling, before a skin forms. Those directions do not endorse painting wet caulk. My combined wet-caulk and wet-paint sequence is a field variation, not the published procedure. Follow the actual product directions for a manufacturer-directed method. [6]

Manufacturer direction

3M specifies Scotch Delicate Surface Painter's Tape 2080 for smooth or lightly textured delicate surfaces, including paint at least 24 hours old. Select tape by its stated use, not color alone. Scotch's general removal guidance says to wait until paint is dry to the touch, score the edge, and pull the tape back slowly at about 45 degrees. That timing differs from my wet-removal method. Check the tape and coating instructions together. [7, 8]

For the full crew sequence and the distinction between field practice and published directions, see [Interior Painting Techniques and Guidelines for a Paint Crew](#).

9. Final inspection and completion

The correction is ready for handover when the dried finish is consistent across the complete wall and its edges, with no remaining flashing, holidays, pinholes, raised application marks, or obvious repair outline. Inspect at multiple angles; outdoors, repeat under changing daylight, and indoors, use a work light as well as the room's normal lighting.

Field practice

Inspection is part of every step. I do not want to discover a raised patch or mismatched texture after the final coat. We correct the surface first, check it again, apply evenly, and inspect the dried result before deciding the work is complete.

When another coat is needed, correct any continuing cause first and respect the product's recoat requirements. A further full-wall coat can even the finish; it cannot substitute for leveling a poor repair or correcting an unsuitable application condition.

Sources and editorial record

Field practice is drawn from Joshua Christopher's supplied interview for this entry. The photographs were supplied by him for this article; no photographer credit or before-and-after relationship is inferred. Editorial preparation: October 1, 2026. Source review dates and document editions are recorded below; this is not a coating-specific job specification.

[1] Sherwin-Williams. Uneven Gloss (Flashing). Checked October 1, 2026.

[Open source](#)

[2] Sherwin-Williams. How to Paint Vinyl Siding. Checked October 1, 2026.

[Open source](#)

[3] Sherwin-Williams. Exterior: Product Application Frequently Asked Questions. Checked September 30, 2026.

[Open source](#)

[4] Sherwin-Williams. Uneven Color (Picture Framing/Hatbanding). Checked September 30, 2026.

[Open source](#)

[5] PPG Architectural Finishes. FLOOD FLOETROL FLD6 technical data sheet, April 2016; manufacturer document hosted by Home Depot. Checked October 1, 2026. Confirm current labels for the products being used.

[Open source](#)

[6] Sherwin-Williams. 950A Siliconized Acrylic Latex Caulk product data sheet; reviewed copy includes March 2018 and November 2020 page dates. Checked October 1, 2026.

[Open source](#)

[7] 3M. Scotch Delicate Surface Painter's Tape 2080. Checked October 1, 2026.

[Open source](#)

[8] 3M. Proper Tape Removal. Checked October 1, 2026.

[Open source](#)

[9] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Lead-Safe Renovations for DIYers. Updated August 20, 2026; checked October 1, 2026.

[Open source](#)