

# Self Service Car Wash News / Fall 2004

from "The Wall" by Lisa Lyons

## PVC Walls

While FRP Panels and spray-on fiberglass walls have their proponents, a number of operators are turning away from fiberglass because of the need to use acid products to clean them. They are trying PVC walls and panels. While doing research for this article, I was rather surprised at the number of operators choosing to use this product. They all had tried several different options including FRP panels, spray-on fiberglass, tile, and many different types of paint. The other thing they had in common were the reasons they decided to try the PVC walls. They were looking for something that was easy to install, did not require closing their carwash for a long length of time, easy to keep clean, and they also all like the look of the PVC panels after installation. The PVC walls reflect light really well and give an old carwash a new, bright shiny look.

PVC panels are relatively lightweight, easy to install, can be used on the ceiling, exterior and interior walls and can be attached to cover just about any building material. The rigid PVC does not buckle like FRP panels and contains UV inhibitors to prevent yellowing. Panels can be installed in any climate area, even in extreme hot and cold climates.

There are two main manufacturers of this product that are serving the carwash industry: **Extrutech Plastics, Inc.** in Manitowac, Wisconsin, and **Royal Building Systems**, headquartered in Ontario, Canada. Both companies manufacture very similar PVC panels for covering and rehabbing existing



The brilliant white wall rehab using Extrutech PVC panels at the All Star Carwash has gotten rave reviews from Jimmy Allen's customers in Radcliff, Kentucky — "the bays now look like operating rooms!"

bay walls. Recent price quotes indicate that the Extrutech Plastics panels cost about \$1.50 per square foot (material only). The panels are 1/2 inch thick, 12 inches wide and can be purchased in any length up to 20 feet.

Royal Building System's ReNew panels cost between \$2 to \$2.50 a square foot (material only). They're 14 inches wide and can be obtained custom cut to any length up to 20 feet.

My personal interest in this type of wall covering product has increased for a couple reasons. First, PVC panels have been creating a real growing "buzz" in the SS community over the last couple years — a lot of operators are talking about it, and quite a few have been installing it. And secondly, I have had a PVC door at one of my washes for 5 years and have been more than happy with the results. It faces the truck bay so it is always getting dirty from the trucks and it's always wet. I had to replace two metal doors in 10 years and was look-

ing for something that would hold up to the abuse of being right next to my truck bay. The PVC door is washed down daily with the hi-pressure gun and I clean it once a month with 409 using a nylon brush. After 5 years, it still looks as good as the day it was installed!

Jim Allen in Radcliff, Kentucky had the Extrutech panels installed on his All Star Carwash concrete blocks walls almost one year ago. He had tried paint and FRP board but was not happy with the results. He spent approximately a total of \$20,000 for material and labor to have the Extrutech installed on the walls of his 6 + 2 carwash. Jim said, "I installed all new equipment, signage and have 4 lights in each bay along with putting up the PVC panels. A night the bays look like operating rooms they are so bright! My customers all tell me it looks great!"

Jim used anchor lag bolts to install the signage and tightened them down just before the panel starts to dimple. He hasn't had any damage to the panels except for one freaky incident. Pigeons had been chronically splattering his pristine, sparkling wash bays with their doo-doo. One day, Jim had enough and he went after one of the mess making birds — swinging a broom handle like a Louisville slugger. He missed the bird, but whacked the heck out of the PVC and put a small dent/hole into it.

Bob Ivory (owner of Buggy Bath Carwashes in Utah and Arizona) also installed the PVC wall panels and at the same time changed out his light fixtures. While most operators remodeling decide to add higher watt fixtures or put up more fixtures, Bob made the decision to reduce the wattage in his bays. He was using two 400 watt fixtures per bay which were replaced with only two 175 watt fixtures per bay. His canopy was using six 400 watt fixtures and he reduced that to



ExtruTech PVC panels are the latest "rising star" in carwash wall covering materials — easy to install and maintain as well as a good way to really brighten up a bay.

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six 250 watt fixtures. He reduced his electrical load almost in half — from 8000 watts down to 4300 watts. And yet Bob is happy to report that the bays reflect about double the light! Saving almost 50% on his electrical bills should pay for the panels in a few years time. He's become a very enthusiastic convert to and proponent of PVC panels. Beyond utility savings, Bob's really gung-ho on the fresh, new and super clean look his bays have now.

Three years ago, Lorie Cady and Pete Mosteller, (MoCady Carwash in Colorado) installed the Extrutech panels on just one wall of their automatic bay. That one interior wall on an end bay had degraded badly. To save the wall, they had to stop it from being wet all the time. It took Pete about 6 hours to install the panels himself. Lorie said "After 3 years, the panels still look good and our wall is doing just fine. I really like the fact that ice doesn't build up anymore. The only drawback I see, is if you had to replace one of the panels for some reason, it's tongue-in-groove so you would have to remove several panels to get to the one you need to replace. But that's not all that much of a concern. We plan to put up more Extrutech ... certainly on the other side of the automatic bay."

(Editor's Note: in case an Extrutech panel should ever need replacing, there a pretty easy technique to do so. Check out the sidebar column on the right of this page regarding Panel Replacement.) ▶

### Installing ExtruTech

Greg Pack, MetroWash in Alabama has a variety of wall coverings at his washes - FRP, brick and painted concrete block. He made the decision to go with the PVC ExtruTech panels because he like the look of it and the lower maintenance aspect of keeping the walls clean. Greg with the help of his

brother and another worker installed the panels in less than a week on his 4 + 2 carwash.

They started by drilling holes and using the recommended fasteners. However, Greg figured the job would require them to drill 2,000 holes in the concrete block — time for a new power tool! He bought a propane Ramset fastening tool for \$600. It shot zinc plated fasteners (check the manufacturer's website for the recommend fasteners) into the concrete block and it really sped up the process. Before he got the tool it was taking just too long to install the furring strips. Greg said the installation went pretty smoothly after that except for the last J-trim piece was really hard to get in. He's happy with the results of their

hard work though. It cost about \$8,000 in materials (plus the new power tool) to install.

As noted above, Extrutech panels are very competitively priced. But beyond an appealing price point, the Extrutech Plastics company wants people to know that, "... we take great pride in manufacturing products that are all 100% American-made, and our commitment to provide good jobs to hundreds of folks right here in Wisconsin." Chances are that the many operators who have told us over the years (especially since 9/11) that "buying American is important to me" would like to know that fact.



### You Can Easily Replace ExtruTech Panels. Here's How:

The Extrutech walls panels are tongue-in-groove, so removing and replacing a panel might seem challenging. At the recent WCA convention, Scott Charles of Extrutech showed us how. It's not a difficult process. With just a little patience and practice, it's fairly easy to do. Because this supposed "replacement problem" seems to be a concern for some operators, we've described the correct procedure as follows ...

To replace a damaged panel, you'll need a utility knife, two 3" putty knives, and a saw. Then follow these 8 steps:

1. Cut the bad panel down the middle the long way. Use a reciprocating saw or skill saw set at 9/16".
2. The half with the tongue will pull out easily. Pull it out and discard.
3. The section remaining will be the side with the nailing fin. To remove this piece, take a sharp utility knife and score the nailing fin right at the splice. You may have to score the fin several times to free the bad panel.

4. Pull on the remaining half and it should release from the fin. If not, score the fin again with a little more pressure.

5. Once the second half is removed, you are ready to prepare the new panel. Take the new panel and remove the nailing fin. You may accomplish this by scoring it with a utility knife or cutting it off on a table saw.

6. Next, slit the back of the panel down the middle, from one end to the other. **Do not cut through to the front face!** This cut will allow you to bend and "cup" the panel.

7. Once the fin is removed and the panel is slit, take the new panel and start at one end (top) and place groove side into the tongue of the existing panel. Cup the panel slightly and place tongue of new panel into groove of the opposite existing panel on the wall.

8. Work the tongue and groove of new panel in as you go down to the floor. You may wish to use wide putty knives on each side to help snap the panels into place.