

HERITAGE BULLETIN

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Tips, Ideas & More to Help Preserve Oregon's Heritage

HOW TO CLEAN CEMETERY MARKERS

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We have all visited cemeteries with monuments covered in vines and moss or caked on dirt. It is a sad condition in which to see them. With the best intentions folks venture out to spiffy up the markers. Often, though, their intentions are diminished by the way cleaning is completed.

Although grave markers are usually made of seemingly strong materials, they are fragile. Faced daily with the outdoor elements they have frequently become damaged. Cleaning damaged monuments will only make the problem worse. A trained conservator must take care of these. Monuments can also be cleaned too frequently, it should only happen once every four to six years, although a regular water rinse in the right conditions is just fine. Cleaning will help preserve the markers, especially by protecting them from organic growth. Here are few tips to cleaning cemetery markers.



Do not clean monuments in following conditions:

- If you hear a hollow sound when you gently tap the surface with a knuckle.
- If you see cracks, flaking or eroding granular surfaces.
- If the weather is hot and sunny or freezing.

Equipment

- High quality, natural bristle brushes of various sizes
- Protective eyeglasses and rubber gloves
- Soft tooth brushes
- Wooden craft sticks
- Clean cosmetic sponges
- White Rags
- Plastic buckets
- Cotton swabs and toothpicks
- Compressed Air (60 psi max) or small broom
- NEVER USE metal tools, scouring pads or adhesive tape



Cleaning Process

- Gently brush or blow off loose materials.
- Pre-wet the marker with clean water.
- Clean all sides from bottom to top to avoid stains and streaks.
- Rinse frequently.
- Do not use dry brush on the stone. Dip brush frequently to reduce friction or have water from hose running constantly as you brush.
- Repeat if necessary.
- If water doesn't do it there are a few safe cleaners, non-ionic detergents (Photo-Flo, Orvus, Vulpex). Do not allow cleansers to dry on the monument and rinse frequently.



Plant Removal

- If plants are attached to the monument – DO NOT pull them off.
- Cut plant at its base, if long cut about every six inches.
- Let it die off, or apply herbicide to cut ends without getting it on monument.
- When the plant has withered, wet the stone and gently pull it away from the monument.
- Use a wood scraper or brush to complete remove plant residue.

Organic Growth Removal

- Lichen, moss, algae and fungus are common growths on grave markers and cause severe damage. Use the architectural; anti-microbial product, D-2 to remove.
- Wet the surface.
- Apply liquid product with roller, brush or sprayer.
- Gently scrub surface with natural bristle brush.
- Allow D-2 to stay on surface for one to ten minutes, do not allow it to dry.
- Gently scrub again.
- Rinse thoroughly.

Information provided by Heritage Programs Historic Cemeteries Program

