

Dictionary of Terms for the Auto Detail Industry

Abrasive - Natural or synthetic particles (grit or media) found in polishes or compounds which cut the paint surface to remove imperfections.

Accelerated Dry Paint Finishes - Refinish work that is placed in an environment with an air make-up system that accelerates the drying time from 4 hours to approximately 45 minutes.

Acid - A substance below 7 on a pH scale. Different types of acid: phosphoric, sulfuric, oxalic, hydrofluoric. Main use is in wheel cleaners.

Acid Rain - Rain contaminated with acidic compounds from industrial pollution. May cause damage to automotive finishes and glass.

Adhesion - How well a product bonds to the surface to which it is applied.

Air Dry Paint Finishes - Refinish work that is allowed to dry in a natural environment without artificial air or heat.

Alkaline-Alkalis- Substances above 7 on a pH scale classified as basic or caustic. Caustic compounds are used in cleaning products such as soap.

Appearance Reconditioning- The cosmetic restoration of a vehicle to alike new condition.

Base Coat - The foundation layer in the basecoat/clearcoat automotive finishes comprised of a layer of dense pigment applied over primer coat. Also referred to as color coat.

Bath Tubber - A slang term used to refer to a manufacture who mixes his own chemical products in a large drum or "bath tubs", usually of low price and poor quality.

Biodegradable - Capable of being broken down into safe, stable subcompounds by natural forces.

Blushing - Paint finish turns milky or cloudy shortly after polishing new paint. Solvents have not finished evaporation from the paint.

Body Shop Safe - A generic term used to refer to products for the body shops which contain no silicone or wax components that interfere with the painting system.

Buffer - A piece of equipment used by skilled technicians to apply products to a vehicle. Reduces the time spent and improves the quality of work performed.

Buffer Marks - Circular marks which remain in the paint when wool cutting pads are used.

Burn - Damage to paint surface by a polisher, ie. To unintentionally scar or remove paint from a vehicle.

Burnish - Polishing with a tool to make the surface smooth or glossy by friction; increases distinctness of image by smoothing the paint.

CAS No. - Chemical Abstracts Services registration number.

Chemicals - A term to categorize a group of products ie. Polishing, chemicals, chemical cleaners, cleaning chemicals.

Cleaner/Glaze - Combination of a light abrasive cleaner and silicones that allow the user to clean and to provide shine in one step. Cleans and shines.

Cleaner/Wax - Combination of a light abrasive cleaner, silicones and waxes that allow the user to clean, shine and provide protection in one step. Cleans, shines and protects.

Clear Coat - A thin transparent layer of paint (may be enamel or lacquer based) applied over a pigmented layer of paint (basecoat) to provide a deep, rich, shiny finish.

Combustible Liquid - Any liquid having a flash point at or above 140° degrees F.

Compound/Compounding - An abrasive (liquid or paste) product designed to remove oxidation, scratches and other imperfections. The first step in the detail process.

Compound Scratches/Swirls - Micro scratches in the painted finish due to abrasives in compounds and buffing cleaners as well as wool cutting pads. May be removed with a cleaner/polish.

Concentrate - A product that requires thinning with an appropriate reducer. Water, solvent, thinner, etc. . .

Conventional Paint - More traditional ways of finishing automotive surfaces. Generally recognized as lacquered, acrylic, enamel and acrylic enamel paint finishes.

Co-Polymer - A chemical compound of two polymers which are compatible and stable when joined.

Cosmoline - A heavy grade petroleum by-product or paraffin applied to automobile exteriors as a protective coating during transit. Requires special chemicals and procedures to be removed.

Checking, Cracking, Crazing - Paint looks like shattered glass. Paint dries out and lose's it's elasticity. Repeated extreme temperatures cause the paint to expand and contract and pulls the paint apart.

Cutting Pad - Most often a natural wool pad with fibers strands that resemble shag carpet. May also be coarse foam pads.

D.O.T. - Department of Transportation. Government agency-one duty of which is to regulate the transport of chemicals and chemical products.

Degradable - Capable of being broken down by natural forces. Resulting products may not necessarily be safe or stable.

Detailing - To clean item by item each minor part of a vehicle to the completeness of the work.

Detergents - Cleaning products for auto interiors and exteriors with different chemical formulations as the active cleaning agent. Differentiated thickness and cleaning ability.

Dilute - To reduce by thinning with appropriate reducer; water, solvent, thinner, etc.. in accordance with directions.

Durability - The power of long term resistance to decay or change.

Dressing - Water base and solvent base liquids designed to provide protection and gloss for rubber, vinyl, plastic and leather.

Dwell Time - A time period in which a product is encouraged to remain in an active state during application. During cleaning, a product may be required to sit or dwell for several minutes before being rinsed.

E.P.A. - Environmental Protection Agency. Government body which helps regulate the environment. Has jurisdiction over the manufacturer through the end user of a product.

Emollient - A substance designed to add moisture or increase softness. Found in hand cleaners or leather and vinyl conditioners.

Emulsion - Stable mixture of two or more un-mixable liquids held in suspension by small percentages of substances called emulsifiers.

Enamel Paint - Type of O.E.M. paint used for many years. (acrylic enamel)

Extractor - A machine used to clean carpet and cloth seats. Applies cleaning solution in fan spray and removes moisture and dirt with vacuum action.

Fabric Protector - A product applied to fabric or cloth seats and carpets. Repels moisture and food soils. Allows textiles to be cleaned easier. There are resin and silicon types.

Film Build - The total film build up from the metal substrate to the top coat.

Finishing Pad - A combed wool pad normally yellow in color. Also, soft foam pad are now available. Main use is for polishing.

Fish Eye - Complications which occur during repainting. Where as paint is repelled from a spot because grease, oil, or silicone is present on the paint surface.

Flammable Liquid - Any chemical that has a flash point below 140° degrees F.

Flash Off - Dwell time for solvent to evaporate from the paint surface.

Flash Point - The temperature at which a product when heated, will release a combustible vapor.

Foam Pad - A round foam disk made of various designs and textures for polishing vehicles.

Glaze - Product designed to produce a quick high shine. Not as durable as waxes or polymer sealants.

H.M.I.S. - Hazardous Material Identification System. A system of numbers, symbols and letters which give information about health, flammability, reactivity and personal protection for chemicals and products.

Hazardous Chemicals - Products or chemical components that may pose a health risk to the user if used improperly or if proper safety equipment is not used. READ MSDS for each product you use. Warnings are normally written as if hazardous product were at 100% solution.

Haze - State where a product is dry on the surface and appears dull or milky. A dull film of imbedded dirt or oxidation on the paint surface.

Hi-Tech Paints - Includes clearcoat and urethane paint finishes. Within this urethane category are catalyzed paint systems including acrylic urethane, acrylic urethane enamels, polyurethane enamels and polyurethane acrylic enamels.

High Bake Paint Finishes - O.E.M. paint finishes that are baked at approximately 260-300 degrees for 30-45 minutes. Curing results from a high bake reaction prior to the installation of any trim or plastic. This system does not require a catalyst.

Industrial Fallout - Airborne pollutants from heavy industry or railroads which settle onto automotive surfaces and become embedded in the finish. Gradually the particles oxidize and appear as dark specks in the paint. Requires special products and procedures to be removed.

Lacquer Thinner - A solvent combination used to thin lacquer or acrylic paints.

Low Bake Paint Finishes - O.E.M. paint finishes that are baked at 180 degrees for approximately 20-30 minutes.

MSDS - Material Safety Data Sheet. Standardized sheet which systematically describes a product and its hazardous chemical components. Distributors are to provide customers with a MSDS sheet for every product they buy. Distributors should also have a full set of MSDS sheets on their truck.

Metallic - A type of automotive finish which produces a glittery or metal looking appearance.

Metering System - A system which mixes chemicals with water as it uses them, e.g. automatic or coin operated car washes.

Mottling - Paint color appears streaked, with light and dark areas. Cause; heavier film thickness in some areas than others. Excessive wetting of some areas when painted. Uneven disbursement of metallics in the paint.

Multiple Step Process - When three or more polishing steps are required to properly process the painted surfaces of the vehicle. Example, overspray on paint may require sanding, compounding, polishing and waxing.

OSHA - Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Government agency which sets standards for workers safety.

Oil - Viscous liquids of natural plant and animal oils which are mixtures of terpenes and simple esters or mineral oils which are mixtures of hydrocarbons, used in paint and auto polishes.

One Step - Polishing a vehicle with one product that both cleans and seals at the same time. Some times used as short cut to speed production of dealers vehicles.

Orange Peel - The nubby rough appearance of paint; looks much like the texture of an orange skin; surface lacks clarity of reflected image. Caused by paint being applied too dry, resulting in poor flowout.

Orbital Buffer - A mechanical buffer with a pad that travels ellipses instead of rotating on a fixed axis. Used when waxing to simulate the movement of the human hand.

Original Finish - The paint finish applied by the manufacturer.

Overspray - Substance such as paint mist that settles out of the air onto automobile surface appearing as tiny speckles.

Oxidation - Loss of oils in paint due to weathering from the elements. An oxidized surface appears to show chalky paint, dullness and feels rough.

PDA - Professional Detailing Association formed for the betterment of the Auto Detailing Industry.

Pad Washer - A mechanical device used to remove accumulations of compounds and cleaners from buffing pads. Uses water spray and spur action while the pad is on the buffer.

Paint Film Thickness - The amount of paint film on the vehicle. Measured in millimeters.

Paint Cleaner - Product used to remove oxidation and light surface imperfection from the paint surface.

Paint Sealer - A product applied to a clean surface to protect the paint. Durability and degree of gloss will vary.

PH Scale - A scale used to determine the nature of water soluble chemicals. 0 - 6 acid; 7 - 8 neutral; 9 - 14 Alkaline - Caustic.

Petroleum Distillates - Compounds that are derived from crude oil through the refining process.

Petroleum Solvents - Liquids derived from crude oil through the refining process capable of dissolving other substances.

Polish/Polishing - A light abrasive product normally applied by machine polisher designed to smooth out and eliminate the scratches and swirls left by compounding. May remove minor surface imperfections and light to medium oxidation. The second step in the detail process.

Polisher - A piece of equipment used by skilled technicians to apply products to the painted surface of a vehicle. Typically turn at 1000 to 3000 R.P.M.

Polymer - A naturally occurring or synthetic substance consisting of a large molecules formed by smaller molecules of the same substance with a definite arrangement. Used in the production of durable waxes and polishes.

Poly Urethane - A catalyst type of paint known for exceptional durability.

Pressure Washer - A mechanical device that steps up city water pressure 50-65 P.S.I. to 500 to over 1200 P.S.I. A system used to clean surfaces with cleaning solutions under pressure.

Professional - A person fully educated, trained and skilled in all aspects of his profession.

Pre-Wash - First step in preparing a vehicle for detailing.

Procedure/Processing - To put through the steps of a prescribed method of application techniques.

Primer - Material applied to the surface to seal, fill scratches and improve adhesion of paint.

P.S.I. - Pounds Per Square Inch; a measure of air and water pressure.

Quality - Degree of excellence or relative goodness of work performed.

R.P.M. - Revolutions Per Minute; number of complete turns made in one minute.

Rail Dust - Small metallic particles attributed to railroads which settle onto automotive surfaces and become embedded in the finish. Gradually, the particles oxidize and appear as dark speckles in the paint. Requires special products and procedures to be removed. Also, known as industrial fallout.

Resin - A synthetic or naturally occurring polymer.

Sealant - A protective product that penetrates surface to bond with existing paint finish. Polymer resins create a protective film much more durable than wax. Subject to the same elements but much more longevity.

Silicate - A hard glossy compound usually some form of the dioxide of silicone (Si O₂) used in waxes, polishes and dressings.

Silicone - Any group of polymerized semi-inorganic compounds comprised of silicon, oxygen and possibly organic compounds. Characterized by high resistance to heat and water. Silicone can create complications during repainting in body shops. Non-silicone products are preferable for body shop applications.

Solvent - A substance, usually liquid that dissolves or can dissolve another substance.

Spur - A small, hand held tool with a spoked wheel used to clean a buffing pad of accumulation of wax or polish.

Streaks - Uneven application of product on a painted surface.

Surfactant - A compound which helps lift substances from a surface so they may be removed. Usually found in cleaners to improve rinsing.

Swirl Marks - Same as buffer marks but due generally to application of pressure.

Technician - A person skilled and knowledgeable of the duties he/she is to perform.

Teflon® - Non stick coating to reduce surface friction. Teflon® powder maybe used in polishes, waxes and sealers as a leveler to ease application and removal of excess material.

Throw off - Product which is thrown from the surface or tool due to centrifugal force. For buffing, this appears as tiny speckles of product on other surfaces.

Top Coat - The top layer of paint which is the color coat on conventional paint finishes and the clear coat on basecoat/clearcoat paint finishes.

Transit Coating - A protective coating applied to auto exteriors prior to transportation to prevent damage to the painted surfaces. Requires special removal procedures.

Two Step - A term to describe the process of cleaning or polishing the paint surface followed by a separate finishing application of a durable coating of wax or sealer.

Ultra Violet Ray - A component of ordinary light which cannot be seen by the human eye. Deteriorates automobile surfaces by causing fading, cracking, peeling and discoloration. Some products contain ingredients that guard against UV damage.

Urethane Paint - A catalyst activated paint known for exceptional durability.

Wash Mitt - A large, soft pouch worn on the hand used to wash automobile surfaces.

Water Based - A compound whose primary liquid ingredient is water.

Water Soluble - Characterized by the ability to mix completely in or with water.

Wax/Waxing - May be in paste or liquid form for application by hand or polisher. Designed not only to provide protection but also enhance shine. Final step in detail process.

Weathering - The change or failure in paint caused by exposure to weather.

Wet Sanding - A procedure of simultaneously sanding and rinsing an automotive finish to remove imperfections. Regarded as complicated and should only be attempted by professionals.

Wheel Marks - Circular scratch marks in the paint surface. Also, called buffer marks or swirls.