

# ORGANIC GROWTH FACT SHEET

## Introduction

In the construction industry the term “algae” is frequently used to describe occurrence of the various organic growths which are commonly found on buildings. These organic growths include a range of algae, moss, lichens and fungi and they can be found on external surfaces such as brickwork, blockwork, concrete, masonry and render.

## How do they colonise surfaces?

In general these organisms only require a surface, small amounts of nutrient and/or minerals, some heat and/or light, and the presence of moisture to encourage colonization. Effectively, in our climate the organisms only require high moisture levels or high humidity for growth to occur.

The colony is usually spread by the wind, with the initial spores being blown onto the roughish texture of most building materials as a component of air borne dust. The damper, northern sides of buildings are usually more prone to infection; however, once established, some can even flourish on drier, southern facing surfaces. Some can survive for long periods without water. The most common infection is usually green algae but these growths can also be present as red, brown or black stains. The growth itself traps dirt and pollutants, leading to further unsightly staining.

These infections commonly occur in rural districts and coastal environments. They are also becoming more common in towns and cities, where the levels of air-borne sulphurous pollution have been dropping and conditions are more favourable.

## Organic Growth On Buildings

The infections usually occur where there is frequent wetting of the surface of the building. This may be caused by maintenance faults, design features resulting in poor water shedding, or repeated exposure to driving rain. In many cases localised growths occur at leaking water pipes or gutters. In general these infections are unlikely to cause major structural damage. Their principal effect is to change the aesthetic qualities of a building due to unsightly staining of the surface.

If manufacturer's instructions are not followed closely, a satisfactory finish may not be achieved and Kilwaughter Chemical Co Ltd will accept no responsibility.

## Treatment and removal

Infection can be minimized in the first instance by regular maintenance of building surfaces; very cold or dry conditions (such as a hard winter frost or a long dry summer) reduce growth.

Once established, the best way to treat and remove them is to use a surface biocide or algaecide, available from any good builder's merchant or hardware store. The chemicals themselves are available from a range of manufacturers; many are supplied as concentrates and require specific dilution rates and application methods. Thus the manufacturer's instructions on the use of the product and also on the use of protective clothing etc. should be closely followed.

Some surface biocides or algaecides may require a few days to be fully effective and thus are best used during a dry spell to avoid rain washing the chemical from the surface before it has time to act. After treatment is complete the dead growth can be left to weather away, it can be brushed off, or it can be removed using a mild power wash. In some cases repeated treatments may be necessary and, after cleaning, a further treatment may reduce re-infection for a period of time.

There is no evidence to suggest that surface biocides, if used correctly, can damage render. However a trial should be carried out in an obscure area to gauge the effectiveness and also check that the chemical does not damage the substrate.

