

Caulking protects your home while saving on heating

Home improvement projects can be fun and rewarding if you learn how to do them properly. Take caulking, for example. It can protect your home, both inside and out, and save you money... if you prepare the surface correctly, select the right caulk and apply it properly.

Experts at the Rohm and Haas Paint Quality Institute have studied paints and caulks for nearly 40 years. They offer some tips to help you get professional results with your caulking projects.

Surface preparation

Proper surface preparation is essential for a long-lasting caulk job. It simply doesn't pay to apply a quality caulk to a poorly prepared crack or joint.

Before you cut the tip of the caulk tube,

carefully inspect the joint, gap or seam you plan to seal.

In new construction, make sure the adjacent surfaces are clean, dry and dust-free before applying the caulk.

On previously caulked surfaces, it is critical that you remove as much of the old sealant as possible before applying new caulk — especially any that has cracked, eroded or pulled away from the joint. This material will no longer offer any protection to your home.

Next, scrape off any loose paint that is present in the joint. Then use a soap and water solution containing a small amount of household bleach to clean off any dirt, grime or mildew you see on the remaining caulk and joint. (Dirt will keep new caulk and paint from adhering

properly; mildew will quickly grow right through new caulk and paint.)

Finally, rinse the surface and let it dry completely before applying the new caulk.

Choose the right product

Although there are many caulk products on the market today, top quality water-based acrylic and siliconized acrylic caulks are a good choice for kitchens, baths and other interior applications, as well as exterior needs like sealing cracks, gaps and joints in outside walls.

These high quality water-based acrylic caulks are extremely durable, owing in part to their excellent adhesion characteristics. They are also paintable,

easy to work with, and have low odor.

Like the water-based acrylic products, silicone caulks are highly flexible and perform well in kitchens, baths and other wet areas, even on roofs. But most silicone caulks cannot be painted and they are not as easy to work with as acrylics.

Water-based vinyl-acrylic and vinyl acetate caulks are harder and less flexible than silicones or water-based acrylic caulks. But vinyl-acrylic and vinyl acetate caulks are easy to work with, and have sufficient adhesion and movement capability for interior applications where there is limited temperature fluctuation.

For help in selecting the right caulk, the Paint Quality Institute recommends that you ask for assistance at your local home center, hardware store, paint store or decorating center.

Use proper application techniques

No matter what type of caulk you choose, it is important to read and follow the directions on the caulk label. To achieve the best performance, it is also important to apply the caulk properly.

Start by cutting the tip of the tube at a 45° angle so that the caulk bead is about 1/4" wide. If there is a foil seal over the caulk, puncture it with a nail or heavy wire; if the tube was used before, stick

an awl down the tip to puncture the hardened caulk.

Place the caulk tube in the caulk gun. With the tip of the caulk gun plunger pointed down, push the plunger into the bottom of the caulk tube. Rotate the plunger tip so that it points up, and begin to squeeze the caulk gun trigger.

Assuming that you haven't used a caulk gun before, practice on some scrap wood so that you get the feel of applying the bead uniformly. The pumping action of the gun can be tricky at first, but you'll catch on quickly.

For optimal appearance, silicone and some solvent-based caulks should be tooled after application. The simplest way to tool the bead into the ideal hour glass profile is by running your finger along the joint to wipe away some of the excess caulk.

Water-based caulks can be tooled with a moistened finger to give the bead a smooth appearance. But be careful not to remove any caulk during the tooling process — as the water in the caulk naturally evaporates, the material will shrink to fit the gap.

By following these simple tips, you'll be rewarded with years of good performance from all your caulks and sealants. ♦

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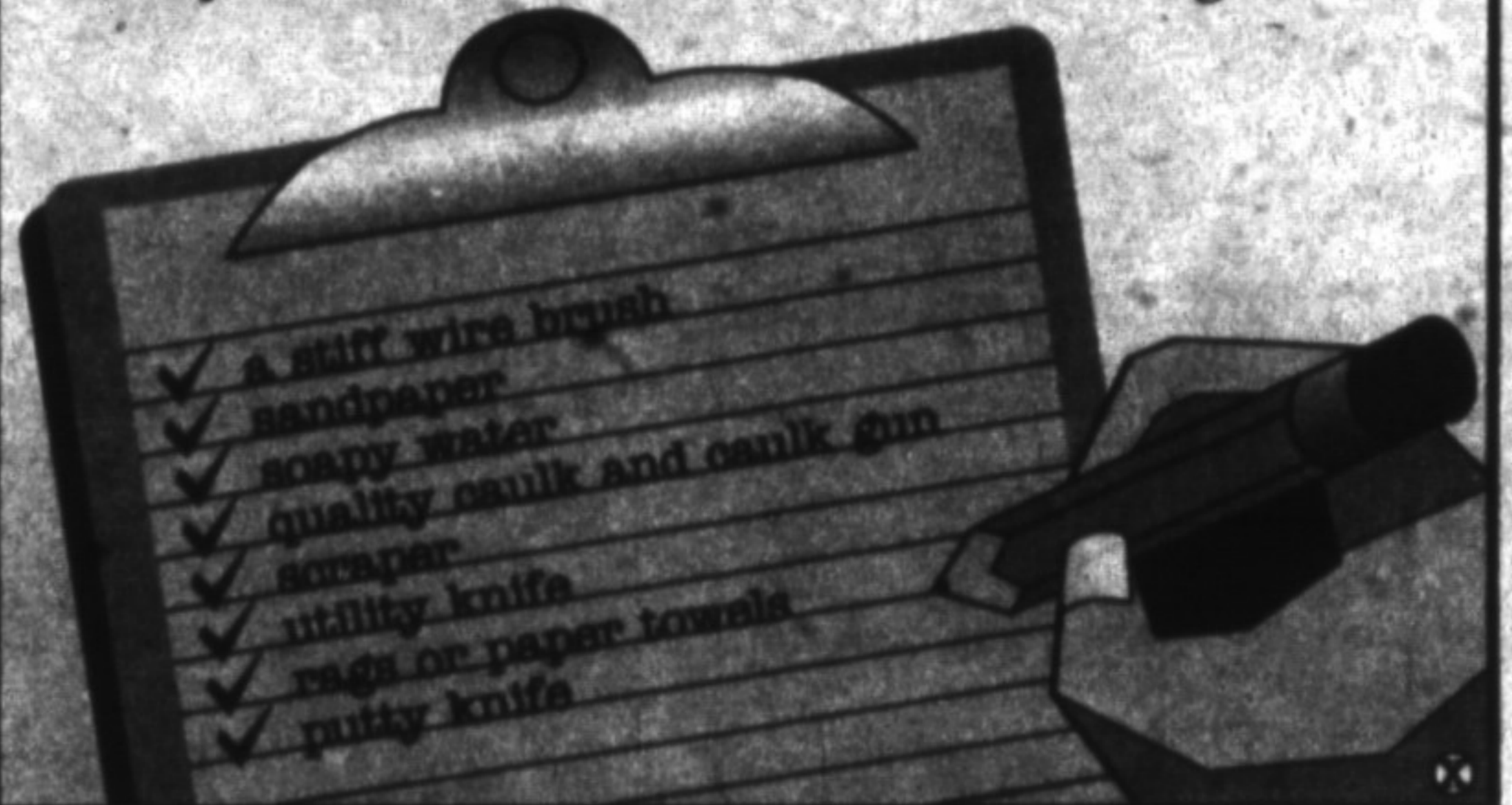
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