



## CLEANING GRAVESTONES – 101

### YOUR SAFETY IS ALWAYS THE TOP PRIORITY!

#### Why clean them?

- Beautify cemetery
- Sign of respect for deceased relatives and others buried in the cemetery
- Improved readability of epitaph

#### What are we cleaning?

- Remove layers of dirt, years and years and years of dirt!
- Remove biological growth (bio growth) - lichens, algae, moss. The rougher the surface area the more bio growth you will likely find. The more detail and depth of detail on the stone the more bio growth as well.

#### Types of common gravestones

Marble (very sensitive to anything acidic)

Limestone (very sensitive to anything acidic)

Sandstone (very sensitive to anything acidic)

Granite (noticeably less sensitive to anything acidic)

#### Procedure

- **Your safety should always be your number one priority when cleaning gravestones**
- **EVALUATE:** Stand back and take a good look at the gravestone to evaluate it. Walk around all sides of it but don't trip over other stones and look out for holes or unlevel spots! Is the gravestone cracked or leaning? Does it have a cross or ornament on the top of it that potentially could be loose, dangerous or possibly fall off and hurt you or someone else?
- Carefully touch and gently push the stone a bit to see if it is potentially wobbly or dangerous.
- **WHEN CLEANING A GRAVESTONE, THINK OF IT AS YOU WOULD WASHING YOUR CAR! TAKE GREAT CARE!** Rinse, gently scrub/wash, rinse!
- Before putting any water on the stone, evaluate where the most bio growth or noticeable dirt is located on the stone.
- When ready to begin, douse the stone with lots of water to help loosen dirt and bio growth.
- After the stone is doused with water, one of the volunteers will spray D/2 Biological on it.

D/2 Biological is the most highly recommended, environmentally friendly, gentle yet highly effective solution for cleaning gravestones and historic stone architecture. It removes soiling such as mold, mildew, algae and lichen and environmental pollution, and dirt and staining from air pollutants. Developed for conservators by conservators, D/2 Biological is recommended by the National Park Service and the Wisconsin Historical Society.

- After the stone is sprayed with D/2 Biological, allow the solution to work on the stone for 7 to 10 minutes before scrubbing. The D/2 Biological will help loosen dirt and loosen and kill bio growth.
- After 7 to 10 minutes, use a plastic brush with soft to medium soft bristles to clean debris and bio growth from stone. Use circular motions as much as possible. Use water as needed.

- Start on back of stone rather than on epitaph side. This way if there is a problem, you will not harm the epitaph side of the stone. Plus, people get lazy and often won't clean the back of the stone! The sides of the stone should also be cleaned.
- Start at bottom of stone and work your way up using circular motions as much as possible.
- Clean grooves, carving and text as carefully as possible but these areas might take a little more elbow grease to clean.
- Depending on the size of the stone, rinse the stone intermittently during the process (for large stones) or at the end of the process (for small stones) using a sponge and/or pouring water from bucket or hose. Don't let green bio growth "gunk" dry on stone or it could potentially discolor the stone.
- If you feel you are doing any damage or harm to the stone, STOP IMMEDIATELY, rinse off the stone completely and skip that stone.
- Realize that many gravestones are over 100 years old. Some dirt or spots might not come off perfectly.
- The effects of your cleaning are not fully visible until the stone has had considerable time to dry completely.
- If you have D/2 Biological left after scrubbing the gravestone, consider spraying the gravestone and leaving it that way. This is a good practice because it will help kill any spores deep in the stone and will not harm the stone. Morning dew and rain will wash it off. You will be surprised how clean and renewed the gravestone will look next time you visit the cemetery.

### **CAUTIONS**

- If the stone is wobbly or leaning – STOP and SKIP
- If a cross or ornament on top of the stone seems wobbly – STOP AND SKIP
- If the stone is cracked – STOP AND SKIP
- Don't feel you have to do the highest parts on tall stones. Do the parts that are easily reachable. Please don't take any risks!
- If the stone starts "sugaring" as you are cleaning it – STOP AND SKIP
- Be careful walking backwards so you don't stumble over a stone behind you. Some stones are small or broken and can be dangerous
- Look for holes in the grass
- Cemetery lawn is not very level

### **What NOT to use on gravestones**

- Wire bristle brushes
- Hard bristle brushes
- Bleach
- Household cleaners or chemicals
- Ammonia
- Powerwashers