Stainless steel is a remarkably durable construction material that, when properly specified and installed, will last indefinitely. However, the accumulation of dirt and other contaminants warrant occasional cleaning in order to maintain stainless steel’s original appearance. While exterior applications not subjected to pedestrian contact will seldom require frequent cleaning, high traffic areas undoubtedly require more attention. As with cleaning any material, it is best to try a hidden test area with the proposed cleaning method to be sure no unintended consequences occur.

What to Avoid

- Steel Wool, including soap pads like Brillo® – Beyond damaging the surface with scratches, iron particles will promote rust.
- Abrasives – Decorative stainless steel surfaces have limited abrasion resistance and will therefore show witness marks from the use of abrasives in cleaning. Please note that many commercially available cleaning liquids include abrasives and should therefore be avoided.
- Chlorides – Bleach and other chlorine-bearing cleaning compounds will promote rust.
- Muriatic Acid – There are acids that work well to clean stainless steel. Muriatic is not among them.

General Cleaning

In all cases, it is best to use a clean soft cloth if you need to manually loosen contaminants when applying cleaning solutions. If scrubbing and scraping must be attempted, the softest utensil possible (soft bristle brush or plastic scraper, for example) should be tried in a small, hidden test area before proceeding. In the case of a grained finish, wiping with the grain is advisable. The following methods are effective for general cleaning:

- Glass Cleaner or other detergent/ammonia solution, followed by a rinse.
- Power Washing with a mild detergent and rinse.
- Citric cleaning solutions, followed by a rinse can also offer good results.
Cleaning common soils

Grease, Tar, Sap or Chewing Gum
After using one of the treatments below, it may be necessary to wash the area with detergent and rinse to remove unwanted residue:

- Methyl Alcohol, followed by a rinse.
- Acetone, followed by a rinse.

Fingerprints
Glass cleaner with a soft cotton cloth can usually remove fingerprints. However, if that is not sufficient, there are a number of commercially available stainless steel cleaners that are very effective in addressing fingerprints, including:

- Zep® 40 Non-Streaking Cleaner is quite effective.
- If you have the ability to treat an entire interior area of stainless steel that is prone to fingerprints, as is the case in an elevator cab, an application of Chemsearch® Glo SS Advanced Stainless Steel Polish & Cleaner will remove existing fingerprints and leave a fingerprint-resistant film on the surface. It should be noted however, that application of this type of product may change the overall visual appearance of the finish. Especially in the case of dull textured stainless steel, this treatment will increase reflectivity somewhat.

Stains
- Sodium Carbonate Paste, with a warm water rinse.
- Dilute Citric Acid, followed by a rinse.
- Tri-Sodium Phosphate (TSP), followed by a warm water rinse.
- Caustic Soda Solution (15% maximum), followed by a warm water rinse.

Ink
If a slight stain remains on the surface after using the products indicated below, try a second treatment. If that is not sufficient, a stain removal effort (as indicated above) may be effective. After using an alcohol or solvent treatment, it may be likely necessary to wash the area with detergent and rinse to remove unwanted residue.

- Methyl Alcohol, followed by a rinse.
- Methyl Ethyl Ketone (MEK), followed by a rinse.

Paint
In the case of unwanted paint on the surface of stainless steel, the good news is that solvents can remove paint without damaging the stainless steel underneath. While removal of aged paint is possible, it is best to initiate cleanup as soon as possible after spatter or overspray occurs. If a slight stain remains on the surface that will not disappear after a second paint remover treatment, a stain removal effort (as indicated above) may be effective. After using a solvent treatment, it may be necessary to wash the area with detergent and rinse to remove unwanted residue.

- Methyl Ethyl Ketone (MEK), followed by a rinse should remove the paint.
- Mineral Spirits, followed by a rinse.
- Other commercially-available paint removers that do not contain chlorides.