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FIELD GUIDE TO  
CONCRETE REPAIR  
APPLICATION PROCEDURES

# Vertical and Overhead Spall Repair by Hand Application





Field Guide to Concrete Repair Application Procedures  
**Vertical and Overhead Spall Repair by Hand Application**

Reported by ACI Committee E706

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This document is intended as a voluntary field guide for the Owner, design professional, and concrete repair contractor. It is not intended to relieve the user of this guide of responsibility for a proper condition assessment and structural evaluation of existing conditions, and for the specification of concrete repair methods, materials, or practices by an experienced engineer/designer.

ACI Repair Application Procedure 6.

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## Introduction

One of the most common application methods for repairing concrete is by hand troweling mortars. This method can be used to repair spalled or deteriorated concrete (Fig. 1) or to resurface vertical, overhead, and horizontal concrete surfaces. Applying repair materials by hand does not require significant equipment and is ideal for shallow surface repairs, especially in areas with limited or difficult access. While both portland cement-based and resin-based repair mortars have been used for trowel-applied vertical and overhead repairs, this field guide focuses on the application of portland cement-based repair materials.

Before any concrete repair is initiated, the root cause of the damage should be determined with a thorough condition survey of the structure. Typical causes of concrete damage can include corrosion of embedded metals from exposure to chloride ions from deicing salts or sea spray in coastal areas; disintegration from freezing-and-thawing cycles when the concrete is saturated with water; or deterioration from chemical attack. Understanding the cause of the deterioration, the owner's repair objectives, and the in-service environment of the concrete structure will help in the proper selection of repair materials and application methods.

The technique of hand troweling repair mortars requires the selection of a sag-resistant mortar and attention to detail during application to achieve an adequately consolidated repair that is well-bonded to the concrete substrate. The successful installation is a function of good surface preparation, application techniques, curing procedures, and properties of the repair material selected.

### What is the purpose of this repair?

Hand-applied repair mortars replace damaged concrete and are generally recommended for thin repairs that are cosmetic in nature. Thin overlays of mortar can also be applied to renovate deteriorated vertical and overhead concrete surfaces. This technique, when properly executed, improves the appearance of the deteriorated structure and provides additional protection to the concrete surface.

### When do I use this method?

Structural repair projects generally require other repair methods such as form and cast-in-place, grouted pre-placed aggregate repair, or shotcrete. Experienced workers using wood floats, sponges, or steel trowels can achieve a variety of finishes with trowel-applied mortars. Hand application has been used to repair vertical and overhead surfaces including walls, columns, beams, soffits, and building facades.

Placement thickness can vary depending on the type of materials selected and the size, depth, and orientation of the repair cavity. Placement thickness can range from 1/8 to 2-3/4 in. (3 to 70 mm) on vertical surfaces, and 1/8 to 1 in. (3 to 25 mm) on overhead surfaces in a single layer. Deeper placements may require repair material to be placed in additional layers.

### How do I prepare the surface?

The recommended steps in properly preparing the surface to receive a hand-applied mortar are as follows:

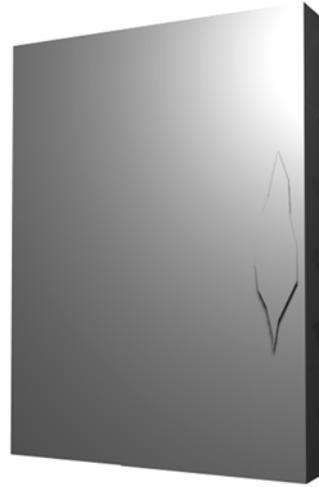


Fig. 1—Concrete delamination.



Fig. 2—Bulk concrete removal.

1. *Bulk concrete removal and edge conditioning*— Loose, delaminated concrete should be removed until the substrate consists of sound concrete (Fig. 2). Where corrosion of the reinforcement exists, continue bulk removal along the reinforcing steel and adjacent areas with evidence of corrosion-induced damage that would inhibit bonding of repair materials. Bulk concrete removal should include undercutting the corroded reinforcing steel by approximately 3/4 in. (19 mm). The shape of the prepared cavity should be kept as simple as possible—generally square or rectangular in shape. The edges of the patches should be sawcut perpendicular to the surface to a depth of 1/2 in. (13 mm) to avoid feather edging the repair material (Fig. 3).

2. *Final surface cleaning*— Use abrasive blasting (Fig. 4) to remove residual dust, debris, fractured concrete, and contaminants that prevent proper bonding. If abrasive blasting is not feasible, pressure washing using a minimum 3000 psi (250 MPa) may be acceptable depending on the bond strength required. Blowing with oil-free compressed air or alternately, the use of a vacuum, may be appropriate if dust is still present after the blasting. The final surface texture should be rough, with approximately a 1/4 in. (6 mm) amplitude (Fig. 5) (Concrete



Fig. 3—Edge conditioning.



Fig. 4—Final surface cleaning.

Surface Profile [CSP] No. 6 to 9 per ICRI Technical Guideline No. 310.1R-2008);

3. *Treatment of exposed reinforcement*—Bond-inhibiting corrosion should be removed from the reinforcing steel by an abrasive blasting wire wheel or needle scaler. If the cross-sectional area of the reinforcing steel has been significantly reduced, a structural engineer should be consulted. If a reinforcing steel coating has been specified, apply the coating after the reinforcing steel has been cleaned (Fig. 6).

4. *Substrate saturation*—Most portland cement-based materials require the base concrete to be in a saturated, surface dry (SSD) condition prior to application to prevent a rapid loss of moisture from the repair material and into the substrate. An SSD condition is achieved when the body of the concrete is saturated and free surface water and puddles have been removed from the surface of the concrete. An SSD surface is not recommended if a polymer bonding agent is to be used. When using polymer bonding agents, follow the manufacturer’s recommended surface preparation requirements. The general recommendations previously given may be influenced by several factors, including:

- Desired roughness profile of the prepared surface (This may be specified by the manufacturer of the repair product);
- Method of surface preparation, including chipping hammers, abrasive blasting, high-pressure water-blasting, or hydrodemolition;
- Possible contamination of the surface by chemicals, oils, or grease; possible carbonation; and methods of removing contaminants or carbonated concrete;
- Repair material manufacturer’s recommendations (Ask for technical data sheets and installation bulletins and read the printed instructions on the packaging.); and
- Treatment of existing cracks and joints.

For additional information, consult the recommendations of the International Concrete Repair Institute (ICRI) Guidelines No. 310.2-1997, “Selecting and Specifying Concrete Surface Preparation for Sealers, Coatings, and Overlays,” or No. 310.1R-2008, “Guide for Surface Preparation for Repair of Deteriorated Concrete Resulting from Reinforcing Steel Corrosion.”



Fig. 5—Properly prepared surface.

### How do I select the right material?

Hand- or trowel-applied repair materials are generally proprietary, prepackaged, cementitious products. Portland cement-based materials designed for hand application may also include polymers, silica fume, shrinkage-compensating materials, and other additives for enhanced physical properties and improved handling.

Specifiers, applicators, and owners can consult ACI 546.3R-06, “Guide for the Selection of Materials for the Repair of Concrete,” or ICRI Guideline No. 320.2R-2009, “Selecting and Specifying Materials for Repair of Concrete Surfaces,” for a useful checklist for prioritizing desired material properties. Manufacturers’ technical data sheets should be consulted for material properties.

The physical property requirements such as drying shrinkage, permeability, freezing-and-thawing resistance, and mechanical properties vary from project to project depending on the expected service conditions. The properties critical to the long-term success of the repair should be determined during the evaluation phase and be specified.



Fig. 6—Treatment of exposed reinforcement.

Other factors that may influence the selection of repair materials include desired application thickness, rate of strength gain, ease of application, color, and in-place cost.

For some hand-applied repairs, sealers or decorative or protective coatings may be used to provide additional protection to the base concrete, to enhance aesthetics, or both. When this is the case, confirm the required curing and drying time (or maximum moisture content) with the sealer or coating manufacturer before application commences. For more information, consult ACI 515.1R, “Guide to Use of Waterproofing, Dampproofing, Protective, and Decorative Barrier Systems for Concrete.”

### What equipment do I need?

Typical equipment needed for hand-applied repair mortars includes:

- A suitable mixer unit such as a drill/paddle/pail combination for small repairs (Fig. 7), or paddle-type mortar mixers for larger applications;
- Air compressor, sawcutting equipment, blades, abrasive blast equipment;
- Water-measuring device to ensure that proper amounts of mixing water are used; and
- Finishing, handling, and testing tools required by the specification or good concreting practices.

Be sure that necessary equipment and tools are on site and in proper working order. Have backup equipment or alternate methods planned and available.

### What are the safety considerations?

Concrete repair mortars are hazardous materials and should be treated as such. Job-site safety practices should include the following where applicable:

- Applicable material safety data sheets (MSDS) should be on hand;
- Machinery and equipment used must have the correct safety guards and warnings in place;
- Workers should wear protective gloves and other clothing needed to prevent skin contact with wet, highly alkaline cementitious materials;



Fig. 7—Typical equipment to mix materials.

- A face shield or safety glasses are needed to provide eye protection;
- Eye wash facilities should be available on the job site.
- Dust masks are needed for workers operating or working near the material mixer and forced-air respirators used for abrasive blasting;
- Hearing protection must reduce sound levels reaching the inner ear to limits that are specified by the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA); and
- Confirm that adequate ventilation is available in closed spaces before operating equipment that emits dangerous exhaust fumes.

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### Preconstruction meeting

Prior to proceeding with the repair, a preconstruction meeting is recommended. The meeting should include representatives for the owner, engineer, contractor, materials manufacturer, and any other parties needed to explain the means, methods, and materials necessary to achieve the repair objectives. See ICRI Guideline No. 320.2R-2009, “Guide to Selecting and Specifying Materials for Repair of Concrete Surfaces.”

### Repair procedure

#### 1. Apply the repair material.

- Mix the material following the manufacturers’ recommendations;
- Scrub a thin bond coat of the repair mortar into the SSD substrate, thus filling pores to ensure intimate contact and to help prevent sloughing or sagging of repair



Fig. 8—Hand application of repair material.

materials on vertical and overhead surfaces. Alternatively, apply a bonding agent if required by the manufacturer or the repair specification;

- Apply the material with adequate pressure before the bond coat dries (Fig. 8). Thoroughly consolidate the repair material into the corners of the patch and around any exposed reinforcement in the repair zone. Full encapsulation of the reinforcement is important for long-term durability; and
- If a second lift is required, thoroughly roughen the surface of the first lift by scoring the soft mortar to achieve an aggressive finish, similar in profile to the prepared concrete substrate. This process will promote additional mechanical bond between lifts. If the second lift will not be immediately applied, keep the first lift moist until application of the second lift. After the first lift has reached final set, moisten the surface of the first lift, scrub in a thin layer of fresh mortar, and apply the second lift of material. Once the desired thickness has been achieved, strike off level with the adjacent concrete.

#### 2. Finish and cure the repair.

- Finish the repair material to produce a final finished appearance as required by the project specifications. Because of the nonbleeding, “sticky” nature of many of these materials, the use of an evaporation control film may be helpful; and
- As with all portland cement-based materials, proper curing will provide enhanced physical properties. Good curing procedures prevent rapid moisture loss at early ages. Consult the product manufacturer for curing instructions. Curing will generally be conducted in accordance with ACI 308R, “Guide to Curing Concrete.” The use of curing compounds (Fig. 9) that comply with the moisture retention requirements of ASTM C309, or moist curing are common curing methods.

#### How do I check the repair?

Requirements may include:



Fig. 9—Spray application of curing compound.

- Before and after photos;
- Confirmation of acceptable surface preparation. This may include observing the surface amplitude profile. Alternatively, direct tension testing of the prepared surface will provide quantitative data regarding the level of surface preparation achieved;
- Material testing performed by a qualified testing agency;
- Sounding the cured repair for delaminations;
- In-place direct tensile bond testing of the hardened, cured repair to the base concrete using methods similar to those described in ICRI Technical Guideline No. 210.3-2004, “Guide to Using In-Situ Tensile Pull-Off Tests to Evaluate Bond of Concrete Surface Materials,” published by the International Concrete Repair Institute. Important observations include maximum stress, expressed in psi or MPa, and failure mode (base concrete, bond line, or cohesive failure of the mortar).

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