

A Sticky Situation: Handling Adhesives

Application ease is an important factor when it comes to the caulking and seam-filling process, and some sealant/adhesives behave better than others. Among the most desirable traits is viscosity with the ideal consistency of the paste-like material being one that allows it to be injected into a seam or to be easily spread on a piece of hardware.

Of the products we tested for this article, we found that Sika-flex 291 LOT and 3M's 4200 Fast Cure had the right consistency to make application a user-friendly experience. They were thin enough to penetrate small seams, but stiff enough to form an even bead.

When applying sealants, surface prep follows the painter's mantra of smooth, even, and clean. Any contamination—be it oil, wax, or loose varnish or paint—has the ability to nullify the adhesion of a sealant. The prerequisite to a reliably caulked seam starts with the usual scrape, sand, dust, and wash clean.

Most products like well-prepped gelcoat or an epoxy-primed surface, but in the case of the latter, beware of what's called "amine blush," a residue that forms on the surface of epoxy resins and primers when they cure. Washing the surface before applying an sealant is a simple cure that removes the adhesion-robbing residue.

All of the test products have the near-magic ability to stick to every place they are not welcome, and cosmetic attention to detail during the application process is required. Lightweight throw-away gloves, a roll of paper towels, and a paper bag to



We prepped the test panels as we would any FRP surface we planned to use a sealant on, cleaning it well to erase any contaminants like wax, oil, or dirt and dust.

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dump contaminated wipe-off towels into are a must. Work from the top down whether it's on deck or filling plank seams on the hull. Use masking tape to confine the over-spread and maintain a crisp cut line. All but silicone sealers can be sanded and painted, but the best bet is to achieve a fair, even bead that needs no hiding.

If you're left with a half-used tube of sealant or caulk, try this preservation method suggested to us years ago by former contributor Dick Wilkens: With a piece of plastic (like Saran Wrap) over your finger, push the sealant back into the tube a bit, leave the plastic in place, and replace the tube's cap. The plastic excludes the air that usually lets the sealant harden under the cap. According to Wilkens, this can extend the usable life of the product for years.