



Caring For Your Retaining Walls

TECH SHEET #797
PAGE 1

Retaining Walls, like everything else on your property, require care and maintenance. With any newly built retaining wall, there are maintenance aspects that are important to watch for after the wall is completed. ALLAN BLOCK walls will need far less care than other types of retaining wall products, but there are some key factors to watch for.

Let's cover the wall maintenance topic in these basic areas:

Site Grading, Surface Treatments, Wall Performance, Weed Growth, and Salt Spray.

Site Grading

Every newly built retaining wall has soils - backfills that are placed behind and sometimes below the wall and compacted during construction. It is quite common for some extra settling to take place after the wall is completed. If you inspect the wall each spring for any unusual or excessive settling, you can save your wall from a potentially large problem.

All retaining walls should be designed and built to route water around or over the wall face. Once an area behind the wall begins to settle, water goes to work to make that area deeper and bigger. If a low spot is neglected behind a wall, each new rainfall will collect water at that spot and work its way down behind the wall. If the area behind the wall is flat, this can have the effect of creating a "swimming pool" above the wall. And this pooling effect will also turn the soils soft and mushy. If the wall wasn't designed or engineered to hold up the added weight, a blow-out could occur.

Preventing this problem is easy. **Inspect your wall each spring. Look for low spots and areas that have settled.** Pull back the landscape mulch or sod on the surface and add enough new fill to bring the drainage back to its proper level. By keeping these trouble spots filled, you can ensure a lifetime of performance from your ALLAN BLOCK wall.

Surface Treatments

Another common maintenance problem with retaining walls is the lack of proper surface treatments. Once a new retaining wall is completed, the surface areas surrounding the wall that were disturbed during construction are typically finished with some type of landscape treatment. This might include paving, landscape plantings, mulch, sod or seed for turf, or some type of ground cover. Often overlooked as part of the total wall design, these surface treatments provide an important function for the wall. They capture, control and route the water from each rainfall.

These surface treatments will need to be checked each spring until they are completely established. Walk the site carefully, and look for areas that aren't in proper condition. Replace bad sod, re-seed bare areas, work with the ground covers to encourage growth and coverage. Look for areas of erosion, ruts and channels on the surface, and re-landscape as necessary. A little bit of work each spring with the areas surrounding your retaining wall will prevent major erosion from becoming a problem and will also enhance the landscape of your ALLAN BLOCK wall.



Weed Growth

Just like with concrete and asphalt pavement, stackable block retaining walls can find an occasional weed growing in the face. Allowed to stay in place, one weed can multiply into a veritable forest. It can happen any time. By plucking the odd weed that finds its way into your ALLAN BLOCK wall, you will keep the wall weed free for life. If pulling weeds isn't your preference, spray the wall once annually just like the lawn, to keep it clean and weed free.

Wall Performance

ALLAN BLOCK walls are made to last a lifetime. The high strength concrete units are designed and produced to handle tough winter weather, and long hot summers. They won't rot or decay. With over thirty million square feet (2.8 million square meters) of ALLAN BLOCK sold and installed, we can say they truly do last a lifetime. With all that, we still recommend a spring inspection of the actual wall itself. Take a few minutes to check out the wall, including the blocks and caps.

Begin by looking for any movement in the wall from the previous season. Properly built ALLAN BLOCK walls will remain in place forever. However, if a wall is not installed correctly, or if drainage or erosion problems are not corrected, some wall movement could occur.

If a soft spot was not properly compacted at the wall base, you could see some minor settling of the wall. Minor settling will not hurt the structural integrity of the wall. However, if it happens, you may wish to unstack the blocks in that area, raise the settled spot at the wall base, and restack the blocks.

Check your wall each spring for bulges or rotation. Again, this can only happen if the wall was not properly installed, but nonetheless, it is good to watch over the wall performance. If you see any significant forward movement or rotation in your ALLAN BLOCK wall, get a professional contractor or engineer to evaluate the movement, and determine the cause.

Salt Spray

In northern climates, ALLAN BLOCKS are produced with a concrete mix design that is resistant to the harsh effects of the freeze-thaw winter cycles. However, use of salts around an ALLAN BLOCK wall could cause surface damage to the blocks or capstones. Look for pock marks or spalling on the blocks in areas where salts are used for winter ice control.

Avoid using any salt deicers on or around your ALLAN BLOCKS. If you need to use deicers in areas around your wall, contact your local building materials outlet for a deicer that will not harm concrete. In cases where salt spray may exist, design the wall in such a manner that the snow melt and snow banks containing the salted snow are directed away from the ALLAN BLOCK WALL.

Maintenance Tips

Follow these simple maintenance steps to ensure a lifetime of performance from your ALLAN BLOCK wall:

- Make a thorough annual inspection of the wall.
- Correct any settling or grading problems around the wall.
- Maintain the landscape surfaces around the wall.
- Take notice of any wall movement - settling, bulging or rotation, and then take proper corrective measures.
- Control any random weed growth as necessary.
- Avoid use of salts as deicers around the wall.

