EUROMECH COLLOQUIUM 651
International Colloquium on Films, bubbles, droplets and phase change

August 25th-29th 2025, Metz, France
https://euromech.org/colloquia/colloquia-2025/651

The Evolution of Waterproofing Agents Through the Ages, Modern Breakthroughs, and Future Trends

Seyed Farshid Chini

Associate professor, Mechanical Eng., University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

chini@ut.ac.ir

Waterproofing has been a critical aspect of human civilization for over 13,000 years, evolving from rudimentary techniques to advanced technologies. This presentation traces the historical progression of waterproofing agents, examines contemporary innovations, and explores future trends shaping the industry. Early waterproofing methods emerged in Mesopotamia and Egypt, where bitumen and natural resins were used. The Romans advanced these techniques with *opus signinum*, a durable lime-based mortar, while the Chinese employed lacquer. During the Middle Ages, architectural ingenuity led to gabled roofs, terracotta tiles, and lime-based mortars. During the Renaissance oil-based paints and varnishes were emerged. The 18th–19th centuries marked a turning point with mass-produced waterproof paints, Portland cement, and asphalt. Synthetic materials like rubber and galvanized metals emerged. However, the durability of reinforced concrete, once deemed infallible, revealed vulnerabilities, prompting further research into degradation mechanisms like alkali-silica reaction (ASR). The 20th century introduced synthetic membranes, e.g. Ethylene Propylene Diene Monomer (EPDM), Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) and, thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO), and liquid-applied coatings e.g. polyurethane, acrylic. A significant advancement in modern waterproofing is the development of deep penetrating sealers (DPS), which utilizes nanotechnology to form a hydrophobic barrier within the pores of concrete and masonry. Unlike surface coatings, these sealers penetrate several millimetres to centimetres into the substrate, chemically react with calcium hydroxide and form insoluble crystals that block water passage while maintaining breathability. The concept of DPS dates back to the mid-20th century, when researchers sought alternatives to traditional surface-applied waterproofing methods (e.g., bitumen, acrylics) that often failed due to poor adhesion or degradation. Early experiments in the 50s–60s used silicate-based solutions (e.g., sodium or potassium silicates), which reacted with calcium hydroxide in concrete to form insoluble calcium silicate hydrate (C-S-H), reducing porosity. However, they lacked durability and often left efflorescence. A breakthrough came in the 70s–80s with the introduction of silane and siloxane chemistry. These smaller molecules could penetrate deeper (up to 10 mm in concrete) and form hydrophobic barriers. The mechanism of action is as follows: Alkoxysilanes hydrolyze in moisture, forming reactive silanols. Silanols react with hydroxyl (–OH) groups in concrete/masonry, creating a permanent silicone resin network within pores. The resin's alkyl groups (e.g., $–CH_3$) repel water while allowing vapor transmission. Future Trends of the filed are bio-based silanes (e.g., from rice husk silica) for sustainability. Self-healing DPS with microencapsulated repair agents, and IoT-integrated sensors to monitor sealer performance in real time.

Keywords: Waterproofing history, sealants, waterproofing, deep penetrating sealers (DPS), nanotechnology.