

Chip Cleaning 101

An Introduction to Cleaning Chips

by Charles Kaplan

In the last issue of Casino Chip & Token News, Volume 13, #4, I published an article called “Chip Cleaning FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)”. The article was a compilation of experiences and suggestions from several chip collectors. While the information was valuable, it did not provide a clear direction for those who were thinking about cleaning chips for the first time. This article presents information more concisely for first time chip cleaners.

So you have some dirty chips and are wondering if it makes sense to clean them. There is no simple answer. Coin collectors are taught that cleaning a coin will ALWAYS lessen its value. That is because it is not possible to clean a coin without leaving behind some damaging marks. The same is not true for casino chips. Casino chips are fairly sturdy and are made to take a fair amount of abuse, but they do get dirty and unattractive. Cleaning a chip that is dirty, but is otherwise in good condition, can improve its appearance. However, there are exceptions. Cleaning a chip can actually damage it or give it an unnatural appearance. Not all dirty chips should be cleaned. There are two main issues:

1) When should a chip be cleaned?

and

2) How should the chip be cleaned?

Generally, you can clean a chip if:

- You are keeping the chip for your own collection
- The chip is dirty, but otherwise in good condition – little wear and no damage
- It is not an old or expensive chip
- The chip does not have any delicate features that could be damaged in the cleaning, like a hot stamp or paper insert
- There is some feature of the chip that will prevent the chip from being fully cleaned, such as: very dirty chips, deep dirt in the mold that will not come out, brightly colored chips that will easily show any retained dirt.

How to clean a chip

There are several cleansers that have good results cleaning chips, including:

- Mild dishwashing detergent and water
- Armor All Multi-Purpose Cleaner (there are several Armor All cleansers, don't use any of the others, they are too strong for chips)
- Quick'n'Brite
- Sterling Magic

- Amway's L.O.C. (Liquid Organic Cleaner)

- Fantastik

Experiment with some inexpensive chips that you picked up from a local casino (and can return).

- After applying the cleanser to the chip, gently rub the cleanser into the chip with a soft toothbrush. If you are cleaning a chip with a hot stamp, do not use a toothbrush; it will wear away the hot stamp. Instead rub the cleanser in with your fingers.

- When the chip is clean, rinse the cleanser off with warm water, except if you use Sterling Magic or Quick'n'Brite.

- Finally wipe the chip clean with a soft towel or paper towel. Make sure that the chip is completely dry before storing it away.

- If the chip is faded, some of the color can be restored by with Baby Oil. You can soak the chip in the Baby Oil or rub it in gently with your fingers. Wipe the chip clean of any excess oil and set out until it is completely dry.



The two chips illustrated above are dirty. The chip on the top, from the Boardwalk Regency in Atlantic City, New Jersey, is in very good condition. There is very little wear; the

edges are in good shape, there is no damage to the chip. The chip on the left, from Bally's in Reno, Nevada, is well worn and is very dirty. There are several rim nicks, with a large one at

the 5 o'clock position. Let's see what these chips will look like after a cleaning.

The chips were cleaned with dishwashing detergent and water using a soft bristled toothbrush. The Boardwalk Regency chip cleaned up very nicely. It has the appearance of a slightly used chip. In a black & white picture it is difficult to see the true appearance of the chip. What looks like dirt on this chip is actually shadows. The Bally's chip looks better in the scan than it actually is. It was so dirty, all the dirt did not come out leaving part of the chip clean and part dirty. It looks very unnatural. Not a chip you would want in your collection. ♦