



ARLON

WET APPLICATION VS DRY APPLICATION: A SURVIVAL GUIDE

There are two ways to install a graphic film on a surface: wet or dry. But what do we mean by each of these methods?

Simply, when we refer to “wet application,” we mean the use of application fluids, while “dry application,” we mean the absence of them. However, there is much more to know before deciding which technique or material to use for a specific project. Let’s outline the differences between wet and dry applications to help you decide which one is best for your job.

WET APPLICATION:

Wet installation is a technique used to apply graphics without air egress by spraying a liquid 'slip' solution onto the adhesive and surface (for example a window or a smooth panel) before sticking it down. This liquid creates a temporary "slippery" barrier that prevents pre-tacking to the surface instantly. Here's your ultimate breakdown to the pros, cons, and everything in between when it comes to wet applications.

Pros

- ▶ Repositioning: To get the job done in one shot, the graphics "floats" on the liquid "slip". You can slide it around until the alignment or placement is set.
- ▶ Zero Bubbles: Because the space under the graphics is filled with liquid rather than air, you can squeegee the fluid out to create a perfectly flat, bubble-free finish.
- ▶ Reduced Static The application liquid neutralizes the static / that often attracts dust to the adhesive as you remove the liner during installation.

*PRO TIP: Slip Solution

Several specially formulated application fluids are available on the market, such as Rapid Tac. Pre-mixed solutions are recommended for better consistency and reliability. While some shops use homemade mixtures—typically a quart of water with a teaspoon of dish soap—these can contain additives, lotions, or fragrances that may compromise adhesive performance. This can result in reduced bond strength, installation challenges, and premature failure.

Best Suited For:

Wet application works best for the following types of projects: Signage, window graphics, or at warm ambient temperatures.

- **Translucent Signs such as backlit signage**
 - In the absence of a lamination table or when applying by hand, wet application is required when working with translucent signs, with films like Series 2500 have a flat, non-air-egress liner, which could easily trap bubbles.
- **Window Graphics** - Frosted films such as DPF 5200 also have a flat non-air-egress liner, and since it is a very thin material, the use of a slip solution is very beneficial, especially when working with full size panels.





Understanding when to use each method is key to achieving the best possible results. To learn more, **visit wrapitright.com**, where you can explore step-by-step videos for both techniques.

- **Warm Environments** - The liquid solution helps keep the graphics and application surface cool and prevent stretching.

DRY APPLICATION:

Dry application is the most standard application method since it does not require the use of a slip solution. Even graphics with a standard flat liner can be dry applied. However, it is important to note that films with air-release systems such as X-Scape Technology® or FLITE Technology® can only be applied dry. The grooves or channels in the adhesive will trap the slip solution and compromise the overall performance of the adhesive.

Now, how do the benefits, tips, and installation of dry installations stack compare against wet application?

Pros

- ▶ **Faster Application:** Removing application fluid takes time and multiple passes with a squeegee, so applying dry is much quicker and requires less effort. Wet applied graphics also require a next day inspection to ensure that the edges are intact, no bubbles formed, and no left over application fluid behind the film.
- ▶ **Wider range of surfaces:** Dry application allows graphics to be applied on multiple surfaces while wet can only work on flat, smooth, and non-porous surfaces. Dry application works on walls and porous surfaces as well for vehicles and compound curves.
- ▶ **Applications in Cooler Temperatures:** Removing fluids from the adhesive when working in low temperatures can be tedious and time-consuming waiting for it to dry. With dry application, you can achieve immediate adhesion, as long as you work within the recommended application temperature range for the film.