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Sealing The Bottle

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One of the most frustrating moments in model railroading is when you open an “almost” new bottle of paint and discovered it is no longer usable. Sometimes it can be partially rescued by adding the manufacturer's recommended thinner but it often remains lumpy at best. It would be much better if you didn't have the problem to begin with! Happily, there is a simple, effective, and inexpensive way to save some dough and a lot of frustration.

For paints and similar fluids in bottles grab a zipper type sandwich bag from the kitchen. Cut the baggie into squares about two inches on a side. Toss the zipper! When you finish your paint session use a rag or paper towel to wipe the lip of the bottle. Then center a square of plastic over the bottle and screw the lid on. The thin but soft plastic will make an air tight and long lasting seal. The same little piece of baggie can be used multiple times before you need to replace it. I have been using this technique for perhaps fifteen years and do not recall a time when the paint was so deteriorated that I could not use it. However, I do have to make the proviso that if the bottle is almost empty the only thing that will save the contents is to fill the bottle with nitrogen! See Figure 1 for all the exciting details.

Figure 1

The same problem, that is hardening, exists for heavier glues, caulks, and sealants. For example, it seems I never need more than a small part of any tube of caulk when I first open it. The little “click-on” caps that typically come with caulking materials will protect the goo for a few hours or days at best. A week or a month later when I need some more the darned thing has sealed itself solid. The sandwich bag material is too heavy for gooey stuff that come in tubes with tapered nozzles. The solution is to use a very thin, self-sticking plastic such as Saran Wrap. Tear off about four inches from a roll and wrap it several times around the nozzle. Then bend the overhanging material back over the nozzle. Continue wrapping the nozzle with the rest of the Saran Wrap. Lastly, wrap a rubber band snugly around the nozzle. I discovered this secret about eight years ago. Since then I have had tubes of both latex and silicone sealant sit on the shelf for years that flowed with little difficulty the next time I needed them. Figure 2 shows a tube of latex sealant all wrapped up.Baggie plastic or Saran Wrap also works with roll up (toothpaste type) and squeeze tubes with large screw caps. Unfortunately this technique doesn't work well with smaller tubes. The caps are too flimsy and tend to split open if you add any additional material between the tube and the cap.

Figure 2

Next time you open a bottle of paint or a tube of sealant try these methods and save yourself the cost of constantly buying new and the frustration of not having the right stuff when you need it.