The case for surface dressing

Planned preventative maintenance using Surface Dressing has been proven to be more cost-effective and environmentally friendly than reactive repairs, as emphasized in a recent British campaign.

Surface Dressing is a cost-effective method performed at low temperatures which extends pavement life with minimal material usage. Despite these benefits, statistics from the British Department for Transport indicate that the percentage of roads receiving Surface Dressing treatment has declined by 30% since 2016.

This reduction coincides with increased spending requirements on pothole repairs. According to the AIA Alarm Survey, a pothole is filled every 22 seconds in the UK, costing a total of £93.7 million annually (2022/23). There is no doubt a clear correlation exists between the decreased use of Surface Dressing and the subsequent increase in potholes over the past decade.

To highlight the benefits of Surface Dressing as part of a proactive highways maintenance strategy, the Road Emulsion Association (REA) and the Road Surface Treatments Association (RSTA) launched the campaign "The Case for Surface Dressing" this summer.

The campaign material emphasizes that Surface Dressing is one of the most cost-effective methods of extending the life of a road both financially and environmentally thus helping prevent potholes from appearing in the first place. Research from the AIA has shown that reactive maintenance (filling potholes) is 20 times more expensive than planned, preventative maintenance.

The limitations that the method previously had are now eliminated thanks to new technology, allowing the use of proprietary polymer-modified, high-performance bituminous emulsions along with modern equipment. According to the study "Service Life of Asphalt Materials for Asset Management Purposes" (ADEPT & RSTA), a 6-meter-wide road that is one kilometer long can be surface dressed for approximately £30,000 with a service life of 10-15 years. In contrast, covering the same road stretch with traditional asphalt using primary aggregate could cost up to ten times as much with a similar lifetime.

Furthermore, the environmental benefits are significant. Surface Dressing uses up to 75% less bitumen and up to 80% less aggregate per square meter than thin surface (asphalt) courses, resulting in a substantial reduction in transport movements.

In conclusion, the two organizations behind the campaign encourage local authorities to reverse the long-term downward trend of the use of surface treatments.

Nynas has extensive experience in Surface Dressing and offers high-quality polymer-modified bitumen emulsions with a proven track record of providing excellent durability under the most stressful traffic conditions.

For more information about the campaign "The Case for Surface Dressing," visit:

rea.org.uk/surface-dressing-the-solution-to-reducing-potholes