

Bring Back Your Blacktop

Sealcoat and slurry seal can slow pavement deterioration and restore its surface.

By Arist E. de Wolff

Your asphalt surfaces are an important and valuable asset. As oil and asphalt prices increase, asphalt preservation should be an important part of your asset protection program.

As asphalt pavement specialists, customers usually start this process by asking us, "What's the best pavement preservation product for my project?" To make the correct recommendation, however, we need to know: What's the present condition of your pavement? Are you planning a major reconstruction of the pavement any time soon? What's the customary type of traffic on the roadway or parking area being considered for the preservation?

The two most common sealing methods used for pavement preservation are sealcoat and slurry seal. Below we'll explore the differences between the two and the appropriate application of each. Choose the right treatment for a project, and you can slow pavement deterioration and restore pavement surface qualities.

Sealcoat

Sealcoat is applied to asphalt to seal the pavement surface and protect it from the degradation caused by sunlight, oxidation and water. It also acts as a shield against drippings such as oil and gasoline. In addition, sealcoat beautifies the pavement by providing a smooth, deep black, even surface that's ideal for painting lines and sweeping. On older pavements, sealcoating can replace fine particles (sand-size aggregate) lost from the asphalt surface while sealing small cracks and protecting the supporting base material from water intrusion.

Although sealcoats have historically been designed for off-highway use in areas of low traffic speeds, newer, more complex blends are being used on roads, highways and runways. Sealcoat manufacturers can design custom mixes specifically tailored to the needs of various roadways, runways or parking lots. However, for most commercial needs, a standard mix is specified and available from a




Sealcoat being applied to pavement

local supplier who has a mix designed for the geographic and weather conditions particular to that region.

Sealcoat can be applied with varying amounts of aggregate (sand) and generally will be specified with pounds of aggregate per gallon of liquid sealcoat and percentage of water per gallon of concentrated sealcoat material. The method of application is by rubber squeegee, broom or mechanical spray. Many pavement engineers recommend a two-coat application using a squeegee application on the first coat and a spray application on the second. This allows the mechanical down pressure of a squeegee to fill cracks, displace dust particles and ensure adherence. The second spray coat also provides an even filling of voids for a smooth, uniform finish.

It's important to know how much aggregate is being added to your sealcoat and what application methods are being used, as these are the elements that will ultimately determine the effectiveness, durability and skid resistance of the sealcoat.



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Slurry seal truck at work

Slurry Seal

Slurry seal is one of the most versatile of pavement surface treatment systems. It provides low-cost (more costly than sealcoat, but less costly than asphalt reconstruction), rapid usability as well as aesthetic value, while correcting minor deficiencies in the pavement surface and preventing further deterioration. When used at the right time, slurry seal can help double the life of your asphalt pavement and save you money by preventing minor problems from turning into major ones.

Slurry seal is economical to install and highly cost effective to use. Many existing deficiencies of aging pavements—such as cracking, raveling, loss of profile or loss of traction due to flushing or polishing of aggregates—can be corrected with a proper application of slurry seal. Resurfacing with slurry seal also provides a new all-weather, long-lasting surface that offers skid resistance, waterproofing, and improved safety and appearance for your roadway.


Slurry seal is a mixture of emulsified asphalt, crushed aggregate (quarter-inch minimum), water and

additives used to control the setting time of the mix. This is a cold-mix paving system that's applied using a mixing truck with hoppers containing the aggregate, water, emulsion and additives. Slurry seal trucks are specifically designed to

with a uniform black color and a non-skid texture.

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measure out the proper amount of these ingredients according to a mix design, dispense the mix, apply it to the surface in an even layer and finish it with a drag cloth. It's applied quickly, allowing the pavement to be returned to use in just hours after the application is completed. With one application existing pavement becomes more visually appealing,

Whether the right choice for your project is sealcoat or slurry seal, both are cost-effective maintenance solutions for your asphalt surfaces. Sealcoats typically last between three and five years, depending on the quality of the material used and the thickness of the actual application. Slurry seal is a little more costly than sealcoat; however, slurry seal has a longer life span than lighter-duty treatments such as sealcoat and can repair asphalt deficiencies. Both will save you time and money in the long run, when asphalt surfaces that have not received preservation treatments will need to be removed and replaced to repair surface and base failure due to neglect. 

Born and raised in Hawaii, Arist E. de Wolff is an estimator, supervisor and corporate officer of Alakona Corp. He manages the company's safety program and coordinates staff, equipment and materials to complete projects. He has extensive field experience and reviews plans, inspects projects and prepares estimates.

