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**Road coating to battle icy weather in duel over motorists' safety**  
**Cargill pitches de-icer to Goodlatte, VDOT; substance to be tested on I-81 bridge**

By Joel Baird

**STAUNTON — Motorists take notice: The southbound lane on a certain I-81 bridge will probably not ice over before the rest of the highway.**

**The limestone gravel-coated epoxy surface of the bridge over Folly Mills Creek, near Interstate milemarker 219, is designed to absorb and store de-icing chemicals — releasing them when driving conditions turn nasty.**

**The ceremonial "priming" of the uniquely textured surface with saline brine, however, had to wait for drier weather. Congressman Robert Goodlatte and representatives from the Virginia Department of Transportation extended the hours of an indoor informational meeting at the Staunton VDOT headquarters instead.**

**The road coating, trademarked SafeLane by the Cargill corporation, "acts like a hard sponge," said Bob Persichetti, a spokesman for the company.**

**"We know it works, but we don't know exactly how it works," he said.**

**Goodlatte's presence at the meeting signaled the growing public concern over I-81's vulnerability to inclement weather.**

**"I-81 poses unique hazards to drivers when it snows because it's so hilly," Goodlatte said. "I'd be interested in seeing applications (of SafeLane) extended beyond bridges."**

**The test patch of SafeLane was completed in early October by Lanford Brothers Co., a construction business headquartered in Roanoke. The Virginia Transportation Research Council commissioned the project — one of its many ongoing efforts to improve highway safety. Bridges, with their greater exposure to old air temperatures, pose a significant challenge to snow and ice removal crews. Without expertly timed applications of melting agents, fresh snow can form a tough, slippery bond with concrete.**

**The added security of "smart" bridges comes with a price: The SafeLane treatment rings in at \$33 per square yard — or about 30 percent more than a standard bridge resurfacing. But state researchers said the epoxy coating beneath the aggregate will help extend the life of bridges by helping to seal their underlying steel and concrete from the corrosive effects of salt-based de-icing solutions.**

**"We're not just getting de-icing," said Daniel Roosevelt, a research scientist with VTRC. "We're getting the increased life of a bridge — a service life of about 25 years."**

**Roosevelt said that the council and VDOT would monitor the integrity of the bridge for about five years before committing to a state-wide endorsement of SafeLane. To find more test sites, Virginia will apply for federal money in the Hazard Elimination and Safety program, he said.**