



Protecting people, bridges and roads™



Promising pavement

It's kind of hard to get excited about road surfaces in general, much less sing the praises of limestone gravel and aggregate coatings in print. But if a test patch of a new road covering called SafeLane does what its creators claim it does, we might all feel a lot safer driving during foul winter weather — and that's worthy of note, if not an epiphany in itself.

As staff writer Joel Baird reported on Monday, the bridge over Folly Mills Creek near southbound Interstate mile marker 219 has gotten a coating of the new miracle surface recently. Now that colder weather is in the forecast again, it's just a matter of time before the surface — a layer of limestone gravel, essentially, impregnated with a briny de-icing chemical and bonded to the road surface by epoxy — gets a workout during snowy and icy weather.

As the article stated, SafeLane behaves like a "hard sponge," storing up the chemical and releasing it slowly. If everything works, that patch of pavement ought to remain relatively clear of frozen precipitation. On bridges — vulnerable to freezing before other road surfaces do, just as advertised — that kind of early de-icing system could make all the difference in the world.

Just how widely SafeLane could be used is a matter for conjecture at this point. At a cost of \$33 per square yard — about 30 percent more expensive than conventional road surfacing — we imagine its use will be limited to trouble spots like bridges and other paved surfaces with little or no protection from cold temperatures.

Even so, if those treacherous surfaces get a head start at de-icing before road crews can begin plowing and spreading "traditional" snow and ice removers, the benefit to motorists' safety will be enormous.

We'll withhold any endorsement of SafeLane as a miracle cure for winter road misery until the 5-year test period is finished. For the time being, we'll just say that the concept seems promising on many levels. If even one life is saved because of a SafeLane-treated surface, however, it will be more than worth the cost and trouble of coating pavement with it.

Opinions expressed in this feature represent the majority opinion of the newspaper's editorial board, consisting of: Roger Watson, president and publisher; David Fritz, executive editor; Cindy Corell, city editor; Jim McCloskey, advertising sales representative & editorial cartoonist; Dennis Neal, opinion page editor; and Macon Rich, production director.

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