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Cargill's new de-icing solution added to south side of Mitchell Bridge

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HIBBING — It's difficult to think of snow and ice less than 24 hours after temperatures hovered around 100 degrees.

But, given Minnesota's volatile winters, it could be 100 degrees below zero exactly six months from now.

It's then one will be thankful for the work currently being done on the southbound side of the Mitchell Bridge. Feeling impatient with the summer traffic delays there over the next few days will give way to a sense of safer driving come this winter.

Crews of the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) are working to installed a new, special de-icing overlay system on the bridge. SafeLane Surface Overlay, licensed and marketed by Minnesota-based Cargill, is a unique pavement material designed to greatly improve roadway safety during the winter and provide benefits in mobility

"This could be the most significant highway advancement in 40 years," said Congressmen Jim Oberstar Monday morning while meeting with Cargill and MnDOT officials on the bridge.

"There's two principles working here," he said. "One, it will save lives. And two, it will save bridge

and roadway surfacing and extend the usable life of a highway from 15 to 20 years to 35 to 40 years."

Oberstar touted how the product will also help curb corrosion by limiting seepage of water and chlorides and cut costs by reducing the need for deicer applications, chemical usage, maintenance and equipment replacement.

According to company literature, SafeLane is made up of a patented epoxy and aggregate rock laid over the existing pavement. Liquid anti-icing chemicals are applied to the overlay before ice or snowstorms hit.

The material then acts likes a sponge, storing the chemicals inside and automatically releasing them as conditions develop for the formation of ice or snow. It will keep releasing the anti-icing chemicals over multiple events, thereby reducing the likelihood of accidents and the need for highway crews.

Bob Persichetti, Cargill's general manager of the SafeLane product line, said nine sites in six different states have proven the value of the product.

"Results have been outstanding," he said. "An analysis of SafeLane's performance during the 2005-06 winter season found no weather-related accidents at all nine sites. That area combined had a total number of 40 accidents prior to appli-

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Protecting people, bridges and roads™

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cation. From Texas to New York, we've had nothing but great results."

Persichetti said the company is extremely confident in and proud of the product.

Scott Portnoy, corporate vice president of Cargill concurred, adding that if the product continues to do well, it could become standard on a variety of surfaces - from airport runways and crosswalks.

The Mitchell Bridge is the first application of the overlay in Minnesota. As a result, all eyes will be on the Iron Range.

"From the time I was a young kid traveling from Chisholm to Hibbing to see my grandmother or cousins who lived on Third Avenue, I can recall white-knuckling in that old rickety car as we went over this bridge," said Oberstar. "This bridge is a perfect candidate because of its elevation, it has a significant curvature and it's notorious for accidents."

The next closest location of the SafeLane application is on an on-ramp to the Blatnik bridge between Duluth and Superior, Wis., another project the longtime congressman once had his hand in.

"It's great for the Iron Range to be the testing bed for the state and basically the country," said Oberstar. "This really will be the showcase for America."

John Bray, engineer and District 1 MnDOT official, said 14 accidents were reported to have occurred

on the Mitchell Bridge last year, excluding those responded to by the Hibbing Police Department.

"If we can help prove this product works well, and help to improve it if needed, we will be improving traffic safety all over our nation," said Bray.

MnDOT crews will be doing the work, instead of a contracted company. The work specifically on the Mitchell Bridge will take between three and four days, according to MnDOT worker Tony Kilpela.

Kilpela, who is also president of the local AFSCME union, said the MnDOT crews are happy to be doing the work, especially in light of tightening state budgets and reduction of staff.

"And if we can help save the state between \$40,000 and \$60,000," he said. "That's great."

Workers are asking motorists to drive smart and safe by anticipating periodic travel delays, reducing speeds and acknowledging traffic flow controlled by flaggers.

As with all highway construction zones, drivers are also reminded to use extraordinary caution and to be very alert for rapidly changing conditions associated with road construction activities.

If this the SafeLane Overlay proves rugged enough for the Range, plans are to apply the overlay to the bridge's northbound side next year. For now it will simply remain the normal concrete and asphalt surface it is.