



Protecting people, bridges and roads™

Indianapolis Star

New coat for roads keeps ice away

By Meagan Ingerson
meagan.ingerson@indystar.com
Indianapolis Star
October 29, 2007

© Copyright 2007, The Indianapolis Star. All Rights Reserved.

Chalk up one more handy-dandy use for plastic.

Turns out polymers mixed with crushed stone and gravel act as a sponge that keeps de-icing chemicals working longer and can us help us avoid spinning out of control on ice- or snow-covered roads.

A South Bend bridge where winter accidents were a common sight has seen no such pile-ups since the Indiana Department of Transportation coated the roadway with the overlay, called SafeLane.

"Anything that's going to stop an accident in what has been a very troubled spot is a good investment to make," Indiana Department of Transportation spokesman Andy Dietrick said of the project.

Once applied to the roadway, SafeLane absorbs salt and other chemicals that are spread when temperatures plunge. It then releases the chemicals over time and helps prevent ice from forming, providing drivers with improved traction.

The coating is typically applied to bridges, which tend to freeze faster than roadways because they are exposed to the elements from above and below their surfaces.

The technology was developed at Michigan Tech University and was first utilized in Wisconsin in 2004, said Bob Persi-

chetti, general manager of Cargill SafeLane, an arm of the Minnesota-based chemical giant Cargill that is marketing the product.

INDOT so far has used the coating in two locations.

The most recent application was Oct. 6 in Seymour, on an I-65 span, the 530-foot-long Vernon Fork Bridge which crosses the Muscatatuck River.

It also was applied on the eastbound lanes of a bridge in South Bend in 2005.

The eastbound side of the bridge, on U.S. 20 in South Bend, regularly was the site of three or four accidents a year, Persichetti said.

The site is especially difficult to navigate because the roadway is curved, with heavy traffic traveling at high speeds, said Joshua Bingham, spokesman for the INDOT region that includes South Bend.

The area also is prone to heavy snowfall. Salt and other chemicals are applied to the roadway an average of 50 days a year, Bingham said.

Since the application of SafeLane coating, there have been no accidents on the eastbound side of the bridge, he said.

"Everyone loves it because it prevents accidents," Bingham said. "In the long run, it's more beneficial to prevent accidents than what it might cost to put down."

At the time it was applied, SafeLane cost about \$9 a square foot. The South Bend project totaled \$128,805, INDOT said.

(continued)

Reprinted with permission,
The Indianapolis Star, 2007
<http://www.indystar.com>

New coat for roads keeps ice away (continued)

Costs had come down somewhat since 2005, and the Seymour project cost about \$100,000.

Chemicals still need to be applied once or twice a week to a roadway that has been treated with SafeLane, said Steve Giese, operations manager for the district responsible for the bridge. But that is much less often than for untreated roadways, he said.

"I'm a firm believer of it," he said.

Giese cited a day last winter when temperatures fell to 6 degrees below zero. The eastbound bridge was the only stretch of road that didn't freeze, he said.

At this point, there are no plans to use SafeLane in any other districts, Dietrick said.

Statistics on the number of accidents that occur during freezing temperatures on overpasses and bridges in the state were unavailable. But in Indianapolis, troublesome highway spots include I-465 and the Downtown interchanges of I-70, said Bill Dittrich, state bridge inspection engineer.

"If it's icy and (the road) is uphill, your momentum's going to carry you in a straight line," Dittrich said.

Motorist Duane Simmons, 49, said he often has trouble in the winter where the road curves at the I-70 exit for Holt Road.

"Because of the ice and stuff, your car just starts sliding down towards the embankment," Simmons said. "(In winter) I don't take that route."

Call Star reporter Meagan Ingerson at (317) 444-6304.

SafeLane in Indiana

So far, the coating has been applied to two bridges: On an I-65 bridge over the Muscatatuck River at mile marker 45.7. On the Ironwood Bridge on U.S. 20 near South Bend.

Terms of Use: © Copyright 2007 Factiva, Inc. All rights reserved.