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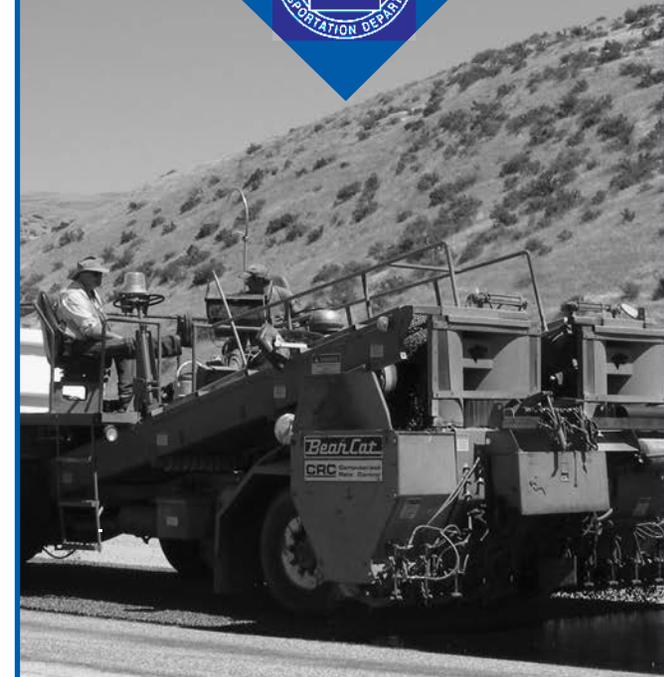
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Frequently Asked Questions

SEAL COATING



SEAL COATING: Why do we do it?



SEAL COATING

Every summer, particularly mid- to late-summer, seal coats and chip seals abound throughout Idaho. The practice always prompts many questions. Here are a few answers. In short, seal coats protect the investment in the road and protects drivers.



Is it a seal coat or chip seal, and why are we doing it?

The Idaho Transportation Department's method is called seal coating, while others, like the Ada County Highway District, call their process chip sealing. The two methods differ slightly in a few minor details, but it's a difference in semantics.

The principle is the same – apply a protective layer of rock chips and liquid asphalt to the highway surface to extend its life and provide greater traction for drivers.

Seal coats help to minimize oxidation of the roadway surface. Oxidation causes the surface to dry out and the “pores” to open up to moisture. During the freeze/thaw cycles,

moisture allowed into the road will expand and contract, eventually causing the surface to crack and deteriorate, which in turn leads to potholes, broken pavement and repairs. The secondary reason for a seal coat is to create a rough, traction surface for winter driving.

Seal coating begins with a layer of asphalt, then a cover coat of gravel on the roadway surface. The highway is rolled and traffic allowed on to the roadway to help pack the surface. Like most ITD highway projects, the work is done by a general contractor with ITD inspecting the work to ensure quality standards are met. Seal coating helps to defer the cost of repairs that would be required much sooner without the protective application.

Why do we seal coat over the top of a new, smooth roadway?

Many homeowners are dismayed when their new, smooth road is seal coated. The smooth surface is covered with tiny



rocks, eliminating many barefoot jaunts to the mailbox and potentially increasing the road-rash factor for bicyclists, skateboarders or other recreationists. However, a properly applied seal coat can add several years of service to a roadway by sealing the surface against weather and wear.

It is unfortunate timing that the seal coat must be applied during the heat of the summer, but the greatest benefit for drivers isn't realized until months later - improved traction on slick roads in winter.

The work is done during the day to allow high heat to help the asphalt and rock bond quickly to the roadway surface, providing a much higher-quality finished product.

The road surface may not be as appealing as it once was, but seal coating helps to protect the longevity of the road.

Without the seal coat, the asphalt is exposed and can begin to wear prematurely.

How can I avoid rock chips in my windshield or paint job?

Before any seal coat is final, crews "broom" or sweep the roadway surface to remove excess rock chips. Following posted speed limits and increasing the following distance will also reduce the risk of windshield damage caused by loose rock chips.

Windshield damage is often attributed to the seal coat, but is frequently caused by impatient drivers going too fast, whose tires spray rocks indiscriminately at other vehicles.

Drivers are also reminded to slow down and watch for equipment and workers. Especially in a confined work area, safety is paramount.

