



A "roto-mill" grinds up the existing material and spews it alongside the right-of-way on I-75 in northern lower Michigan. It will be mixed with new asphalt to become a smooth, new surface.

Rising oil prices fosters asphalt recycling process

Spiraling petroleum prices are forcing cost-cutting changes in road building and the results so far have been surprisingly good.

Recycling — shaving off layers of old asphalt, crushing it and mixing it with new asphalt — has reduced costs and improved the quality of the new roads, according to some road builders.

"Asphalt contains oil that amounts to only 5 percent of its cost," says Lawrence Martin, executive director of the Michigan Road Builders Association in Lansing.

"Rising oil prices increased the cost of asphalt by 35 percent this year. We aren't sure yet how much we can save by recycling because the process is still so new, but we have been realizing about 25 percent savings in the jobs we have done so far," Martin adds.

Since the 1973-74 oil embargo the price of asphalt in Michigan has risen 233 percent from \$36 a ton to more than \$120 per ton.

Such price hikes caused an initial 25-30 percent drop in asphalt use nationally. But consumption then picked up when the federal government instituted aid to the states for safety upgrading and more recently for restoration, rehabilitation and resurfacing of roads.

STATE and local governments fear they will be forced to do less road maintenance because their fixed budgets are being adversely affected by inflation — declining tax revenue as gas-

oline consumption is reduced through less pleasure driving and the use of smaller cars.

Federal assistance for this type of work must be met with 30 percent state funding.

Conventional resurfacing simply applies new asphalt over the old. As the layers add up the street surface rises, sometimes covering curbs of city streets and creating dangerous drops from road to shoulder on rural highways.

In recycling, the shaving of old layers results in a smooth, better-graded street with curbs and drainage left intact.

Also, cracks in the old, underlying surface cannot reflect through to the new surface.

"We're actually constructing a new road, one we hope will last for another 20 years," adds Fred Copple of the testing and research division of the Michigan Department of Transportation.

The largest recycling jobs in Michigan have been 10 miles of I-75 near Grayling in Crawford County which was completed last year. And 11 more miles of I-94 underway near Bridgman in Berrien County.

IN MICHIGAN last year, 11,820,000 tons of asphalt were used for resurfacing and patching, according to the National Asphalt Paving Association.

That compared with 8,845,000 tons used in 1977. Spartan Asphalt Paving Co. has been a pioneer in recycling and last year was awarded the state's first contract permitting use of recycled material for the pavement's top surface.

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