

TAKING THE PAIN OUT OF PARKING LOTS

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Many property owners give their parking lot about as much thought as snow in August. Reality is that pavement expense consistently ranks in the top three (roofing & HVAC round out the group) for capital expenditure projects. Too often, owners are caught unaware when cost estimates run into hundreds of thousands of dollars to repair neglected pavement. This massive budget hit doesn't need to be a surprise, and can be postponed by years with a proactive maintenance program.

Asphalt is designed as a wearing surface, yet begins to deteriorate immediately after installation. Pavement is under constant attack by traffic loads, ultra-violet rays, elements, excessive landscape water, earth movements, and other factors. Initial maintenance (sealcoat) should commence within one year of asphalt installation, and continue intermittently throughout the life of the pavement. Neglected pavement will turn gray, severely crack, "alligator", pothole, and eventually disintegrate. Each level of deterioration incurs additional cost for repair. Properly installed and maintained asphalt can reasonably be expected to last 25-30+ years.

An asphalt maintenance program typically consists of sectional repairs, crack sealing, sealcoating, and pavement marking (striping). Once the parking lot is stabilized, most maintenance schedules can be extended to every 3-5 years. **Asphalt maintenance generally is about 1/5 the cost of complete reconstruction.**

Partner with your pavement contractor to develop a Pavement Management Plan to assist with budgeting and forecasting. It's a good idea to have a qualified pavement contractor inspect your property every 2 years or so to ensure that no anomalies are popping up. This can usually be accomplished with little or no expense.

One helpful tip when enacting a maintenance plan is to establish a specification before putting your project to bid. Work with a trusted pavement contractor to determine a specification that remedies defects yet also meets budgetary requirements. To confirm competitive value-pricing, use the specification as a template for other contractors to bid. That said, encourage your bidders to include alternative specifications – you never know who might build a better mousetrap!

Your diligence in contractor selection makes all the difference in the end product. As mentioned in previous newsletters, all California contractors must possess a valid contractor's license. Always confirm license status with the California State License Board at www.clsb.ca.gov. Additionally, contractors must carry Workman's

Compensation and General Liability insurance. Receive confirmation of both prior to signing a contract. Most reputable pavement contractors carry ~\$5MM general liability umbrella policy, so be extremely wary if a contractor balks at your request.

Asking for references is a great idea, but everyone has favored customers or even aunts & uncles that will rave about them – request references for jobs completed within the past 30 days, or, even better, ask for a reference from a job that didn't go well. (Every company has an occasional hiccup. The way that hiccup is dealt with speaks volumes about the contractor's stability and integrity.) Does your contractor provide a warranty?

In addition to securing the most cost-efficient solution for your property, it's equally important to ensure that work is performed with as little disruption as possible. Notify all tenants/residents of scheduled work well in advance. Then notify them again...and again...and again. Many contractors will provide multiple notifications on your behalf explaining closures, temporary traffic patterns, and direct contact information. Most include a map or site plan. Typically, there is no additional charge for this service.

Different cities/counties have variances in permit requirements. Check with your local agency to determine their requirements before commencing work.

As with all projects, safety is the number one priority. Review your contractor's plan for traffic flow and delineation of work areas. Ensure that the contractor has an ongoing internal safety program and that all employees are provided with relevant safety equipment.

Before final payment, secure Conditional Lien Releases from your contractor, subcontractors, and material suppliers. Also, conduct a "walk through" to confirm that all contractual items were fulfilled.

The bottom line is that property managers and owners must enact an ongoing pavement maintenance strategy into their overall property plan. Economic efficiencies will be realized, and liability exposure (trip & fall and others) can be reduced. As an added bonus, a fresh, new appearance projects a very discerning professional image. Your parking lot is your welcome mat. Is yours welcoming?

This article is intended to provide an overview of pavement maintenance, and all factors mentioned may not be applicable to your specific property. Contact your preferred contractor for a detailed inspection of your pavement. July, 2010