



Road maintenance

Surface Dressing



Improving the road network for the people of Kent

Roadworks are never popular, but they are a “fact of life” if we want to drive on well maintained, pothole-free roads.

All road surfaces wear out over time and need maintenance to keep them in a safe condition. Surface dressing is a simple and cost effective way of improving the road surface and can prevent more expensive repair work being needed later. This leaflet answers some of the more common questions asked about surface dressing.



Chipping spreader being loaded

Q. Surface dressing with hot bitumen and loose chippings seems a very messy way of repairing the road surface. Why is it still done?

A. Surface dressing is still a valuable way of repairing a road surface that is showing signs of wear. If it is done when the road first starts to wear it can prevent the need for the surface to be removed and replaced or for the road to be completely rebuilt, both of which are very expensive.

Contact for Surface Dressing

Phone your local Highway Unit:

Ashford
01233 637311

Canterbury
01227 862000

Dartford
01322 343279

Dover
01304 821199

Gravesham
01474 337520

Maidstone
01622 602132

Sevenoaks
01732 227326

Shepway
01303 850388

Swale
01795 417210

Thanet
01843 577577

Tonbridge & Malling
01732 844522

Tunbridge Wells
01892 544835

Or write to:

The Network
Operations Manager,
Network Management
Kent County Council
Invicta House
County Hall
Maidstone
Kent ME14 1XX

Q. What does surface dressing involve?

A. Surface dressing involves spraying the existing road with a coating of hot bitumen and then covering it with stone chippings. The chippings are rolled into the bitumen to form a water resistant, protective layer with improved skid resistance.

The work can only be done in the summer, when the weather is warm and dry, because the bitumen will not stick to the road in cold or wet conditions. As soon as the bitumen has set, the road is swept to remove any excess chippings.

Q. How does Kent Highways decide which roads are going to be treated?

A. The county's roads are regularly assessed to record their condition. Surveys are carried out to measure skid resistance and checks are made for cracking and subsidence.

When roads begin to show signs of wear, the skid resistance drops or small cracks appear, surface dressing can be used to extend their life. Surface dressing costs just a fifth of the cost of resurfacing. In practice this means that each year 300 miles of Kent roads are dressed for the cost of resurfacing just 60 miles.

Q. Why are there so many loose chippings left behind?

A. The only way to make sure that all of the road is properly covered is to put down more chippings than will eventually remain on the finished road. As soon as the bitumen has set, the excess chippings are swept up. Traffic may be allowed back on the road before the loose chippings are removed, both to reduce congestion and because slow moving vehicles help to embed the chippings.

Advisory speed restriction signs are left out for a few days after surface dressing both to protect the new surface and to prevent damage to vehicles. If the chippings do not stick because of a problem with the bitumen or changes in the weather, extra sweeping or 'dusting' is carried out to minimise the effect on traffic.

Q. Who carries out the work?

A. Surface dressing is carried out by a contractor working for Kent County Council. The contractor, whose name should be displayed on the sides of the vehicles used, covers the whole of Kent.

Q. How can I help?

A. Motorists can help by driving carefully and obeying temporary speed limit signs, particularly when driving on roads which have just been opened after being dressed. Also by taking note of signs asking them not to park where surface dressing work is planned.

Nearby residents should take care not to walk on a recently-dressed road until the bitumen has set properly as it could stick to their shoes and be walked into the house.

Problems with loose chippings can be reported to the county council using the contact numbers overleaf. Problems such as broken

windcreens or other damage should be reported as soon as possible. The council's contractors are required to carry third party insurance, and any claim received will be passed to them for processing. All claims will be investigated to determine whether or not the contractor is liable, and submitting a claim does not necessarily mean that compensation will be paid.

