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POTHOLES

'Pizza oven' trucks a hot fix for road craters

Chip Martin
Sun Media

March 23, 2009

Pizza technology is being pressed into service to deal with this winter's bumper crop of potholes.

If hot and ready pizza can fill tummies, the thinking goes, why not road craters?

With pothole season about to end, city crews are coping with thousands of potholes created by the freeze-thaw cycle and runoff or rain.

This year, they've pressed into service six "pizza oven" trucks to repair the worst damage.

Ordinarily, city crews use a pebbly "cold patch" to fill potholes. But in some cases, the nature of the opening and heavy traffic make such a fix impractical.

Enter the "pizza oven" truck.

Dave Leckie, the city's transportation director, said the trucks allow the city to use



A City of London truck equipped with an infra red heater box travels along Huron Street after filling some potholes. (SUE REEVE/Sun Media)

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high-quality asphalt even though the plants that make the stuff have been shut down during the winter.

Before cold weather closed them, the city ordered strips of asphalt laid down that are later cut up like square pizzas and taken to patch sites on trucks with ovens on the back. The cold asphalt is heated in the oven at the site and, once malleable, pressed into the offending crater.

"It is very much superior to the cold patch," Leckie said.

The method also means the city doesn't have to wait until next month for asphalt plants to reopen.

There is a downside to the innovation -- cooking time.

"It's a very slow process," Leckie conceded.

So he doubts the fleet of six trucks will become more widespread because there are thousands of potholes to fix and so little time.

Still, the "pizza oven" trucks constitute a SWAT team of road crews.

Overall, Leckie said, this year's crop of potholes is only about two-thirds the number from last winter, a particularly bad one.

He expects about \$400,000 worth of materials will be needed to fill potholes this year -- an average amount -- and \$100,000 less than last winter, which had a big thaw in January and much wetter conditions than this winter.

There may not be more potholes this year, but there are more complaints -- a four-fold increase -- which Leckie attributed to the city's pothole hotline.

He said complaints often trigger immediate attention to the freshest and nastiest potholes. But, unlike some pizza operations, he said, the city has no policy of promising patches in 30 minutes or it's free.

Chip Martin is a Free Press politics reporter.

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A City of London worker holds some asphalt before it is heated in a truck equipped with an infra red heater box. The heating takes about 20 minutes depending on the air temperature. (SUE REEVE/Sun Media)

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Your Environment

Native plants finally get some respect (Sep. 17, 2009)

They're plants with all the traits you'd expect from Southwestern Ontarians -- more hard-working than showy, favouring substance over glamour. Hardy, practical, deep.

Light shines on colourful upgrades

(Sep. 17, 2009)
The London Convention Centre unveiled a \$1.3-million upgrade yesterday, a makeover that transformed a drab hallway into a colourful showcase.

\$10.6 million Mt. Brydges sewer project in limbo (Sep. 16, 2009)

Mt. Brydges residents may know next week whether politicians believe a \$10.6-million sewer system there is a go or no-go.

Corn, soybeans weeks behind (Sep. 14, 2009)

Grain farmers in Southwestern Ontario finally got some decent weather in August, but they still face the threat of frost in coming weeks.

Outdoor farm show showcases the future

(Sep. 14, 2009)
Canada's Outdoor Farm Show may sound a note of familiarity as it celebrates its 16th annual opening

The World Outdoors

September second best month for birdwatching (Sep. 12, 2009)

September, after May, is the second best birding month of the year. And we're already here.

Black-throated sparrow nests east of Port Burwell (Sep. 5, 2009)

All it took was a phone call from Bill and Colleen Lindley last Sunday to get the wheels in motion -- literally.

Part-albino hummingbird wondrous to behold

(Aug. 29, 2009)
Bird watchers living in Langton near Port Rowan have sent in some remarkable photos of a hummingbird at their feeder.

Grebe's presence in Grand Bend puzzling

(Aug. 22, 2009)
The eared grebe is part of a large family of diving birds, many of which we see regularly in Ontario.

Lovely luna's lifespan lasts about a week

(Aug. 15, 2009)
There was going to be another topic for the column this week, but after Julia Tomalty sent in her description of her

Pets and animals

Luxury pet kennel now selling dog treats (Sep. 5, 2009)

Jaymie and Michelle Crook lead the pack when it comes to indulging our pampered pooches.

Let yelping dogs keep it down (Aug. 31, 2009)

Bark in the park? Sure -- but only in moderation.

Puppy Pawlooza (Aug. 24, 2009)

It truly gives one paws

Local mutts in running for Ontario crown (Aug. 21, 2009)

TORONTO -- They're bad to the bone.

Public outraged over abuse (Aug. 20, 2009)

TORONTO -- People have rallied out to help Phoenix the Chow Chow rise from the ashes of abuse.

A dog's best friend . . .

(Aug. 19, 2009)
An aged dog hobbled by a 7.7-kilogram tumour would be, to most owners, a likely candidate for euthanasia.

Not so doggone smart

(Aug. 18, 2009)
If you depend on your pooch to signal who is a good or bad person, you're barking up the wrong tree.

Coyotes corner Sarnia paper carrier (Aug. 15, 2009)

day tomorrow, but that doesn't mean organizers are resting on past laurels.

Open-air burning under review (Sep. 11, 2009)

Chatham-Kent could soon see changes in how open burns are dealt with, thanks to a bylaw in the works.

Canadians unprepared for volatile weather

(Sep. 10, 2009)

Canada should establish a national climate action centre to help plan for, and respond to, increasingly volatile weather, says a national research group headed by a London Nobel Prize-winner.

What's the bother about bottled water

(Sep. 8, 2009)

As students return to the University of Winnipeg this month, they'll notice that something is definitely missing.

POV: Wind farm worries must be addressed, not dismissed

(Sep. 4, 2009)

It's really quite easy to dismiss opponents of wind farms as suffering more from the "not-in-my-backyard" (NIMBY) syndrome than any particular health problem.

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sightings near Kenora this summer I decided to change the subject.

Giant moths sport spectacular colours

(Aug. 8, 2009)

Late July and into August is the time the giant moths begin to hatch from their cocoons that have overwintered from the year before.

Wonderful sounds, sights at the cottage

(Jul. 25, 2009)

It was pleasant to hear our summer resident song sparrow singing its heart out at our Grand Bend cottage last week.

Hope growing for Kirtlands

(Jul. 18, 2009)

There is the possibility of great news for a very endangered bird that nested two years ago out of its normal range -- outside the west boundary of Algonquin Park.

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SARNIA -- An adult newspaper carrier says he was afraid of being attacked early yesterday morning when he was surrounded by three coyotes in southeast Sarnia.

Local rescue efforts

feted (Aug. 10, 2009)

A volunteer group in London-St. Thomas that rescues dogs from pounds, puppy mills and elsewhere has been saluted for its efforts by animal lovers.

Chatham shelter

overrun with dogs (Aug. 8, 2009)

CHATHAM -- The local Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has many dogs needing a loving home this summer.

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