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This is why spring is prime pothole season - by Mike Musto

April 07, 2017 - Owners Developers & Managers

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After a harsh winter, as you begin to evaluate the repairs, upgrades and general maintenance your property needs, do not forget about your asphalt surfaces. The wear and tear of plows and heavy doses of salt and sand from the winter months have taken their toll. Spring in New England features melting snow, heavy rains and widely fluctuating temperatures. These contributing factors are a perfect recipe for potholes and other unfavorable asphalt conditions. In other words, your asphalt is under attack. Waiting to act will mean more asphalt deterioration, more liability and ultimately more cost to you. Now is the time to request an evaluation and schedule repairs and maintenance.

So how does a pothole form? As mentioned earlier, a combination of relentless factors come together to wreak havoc on your asphalt. It begins out of sight below the surface. As water seeps into the sub surface from rain, snow melt and the resulting standing water, it becomes unstable. Areas below the asphalt surface become weak and in some cases all supporting material such as soil and gravel completely erode away. Cracks begin forming from lack of support. Vehicle traffic and even more water entering through the cracks expand the weakened areas below the surface and eventually potholes begin to form. An additional damaging element at this time of year is extremes in temperatures. Water below the surface is working double duty, first eroding sub surfaces in warm weather and then turning to ice and expanding, causing frost heaves, when temperatures dip below freezing.

To minimize some of the destructive effects of water below the surface, catch basins and drainage systems should be evaluated and if needed, repaired immediately. A poor drainage system could lead to a major collapse in your lot known as a sinkhole. Draining excess water from the surface is an important component of your overall asphalt plan. Big puddles that are created when water has no escape route accelerate the deterioration of existing asphalt and destroy the integrity of the sub surface too.

Glossary of Terms

- **Potholes:** Bowl-shaped openings up to 10 inches deep, which are created when moisture seeps into the pavement and contracts or expands. As traffic drives over these weakened areas, it eventually crumbles and breaks away.
- **Infrared Seamless Repair:** The process involves heating the asphalt to a working temperature of 300 degrees, penetrating the asphalt to a depth of 3" to 4". After removing deteriorated asphalt and raking in new asphalt, the area is compacted with a vibratory roller.
- **Crackfilling:** The process is the first line of defense in preventing the degradation of your pavement. Cracks are filled using a hot-applied rubberized joint sealant.
- **Sealcoating:** A protective coating applied to pavement that's invulnerable to destructive elements including weather conditions and ultraviolet rays.

- Catch Basins: Type of curb inlet covered by a grate that allows water, sediment and debris to flow off of the parking surface during a rainstorm. The sediment and debris are caught in the catch basin sump while the water flows thru the storm drain system.

Proactive steps at this time of the year that address your asphalt surfaces will immediately upgrade your property, reversing the damaging and dangerous effects of the seasonal conditions. Left unchecked, unevaluated lots have the potential to negatively impact tenants, visitors and customers to your properties, not to mention the liabilities that can sink budgets by themselves. Don't wait until someone trips and falls on your property or damages their vehicle in a pothole. Don't ignore existing issues with your asphalt surfaces and allow them to develop into major headaches. There are many asphalt services and procedures available and scheduling an evaluation by an asphalt professional should be at the top of the spring to do list for your properties.

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