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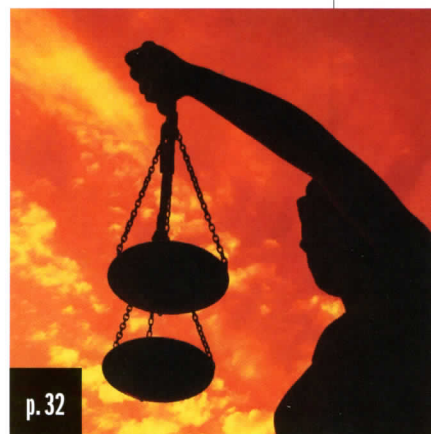
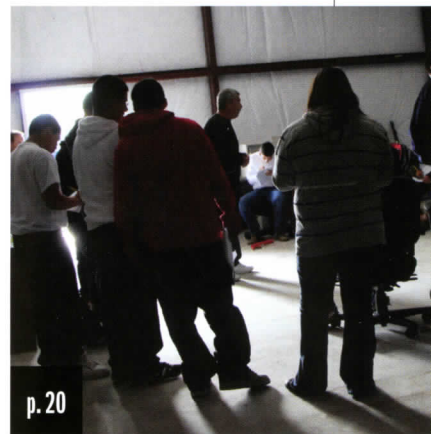
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County Staff

Gene Terry, **Executive Director** / Leah Magnus, **Communications Manager** / Maria Sprow, **Editor**
Liz Carmack, **Contributing Writer** / Ben Chomiak, **Graphic Design**



High-performance seal coat emulsion is placed in advance of crushed basalt chips on a Bexar County road. Photo courtesy of BASF Corp.

Bexar County's pavement preservation efforts earn national award

By Tom Kuennen

Maintenance of county roads is one of the most visible services provided by county government to residents. It's also costly and complex, especially in areas with high heavy truck volumes. But one Texas county earned national recognition last year for its proactive pavement preservation program.

The Foundation of Pavement Preservation – a non-profit trade association promoting pavement preservation (also known as FP2) – honored Bexar County with the James B. Sorenson Award for Excellence in Pavement Preservation last year during the National Pavement Preservation Conference, which took place in Nashville in August.

Intended to recognize agency pavement preservation, the Sorenson award is usually, but not always, presented by FP2 to city and county agencies. Criteria used in evaluating candidate agencies include: process used to gain acceptance by elected officials, general public, employees and industry (40 percent); how well the program relates to the theme of *The Right Treatment, for the Right Road, at the Right Time* (20 percent); tangible improvement in their system (20 percent); techniques used to keep the public notified of what is being done and why (10 percent); and uniqueness of program (10 percent).

Public Works Operations Manager Tony Vasquez received the award on the county's behalf due to his work instituting asset management of county roads beginning in 2004, and the subsequent proactive pavement preservation practices the county enacted to economically prolong the life of its roads.

Pavement preservation techniques include nonstructural preventive maintenance surface treatments such as slurry surfacings, crack sealing, chip sealing, micro surfacing, rejuvenation, hot and cold in-place recycling and thin-lift hot-mix asphalt paving; and structural preservation techniques used in concrete pavement restoration (CPR).

Research shows pavement preservation methods prolong pavement life by avoiding high future costs of reconstruction or rehabilitation through the expenditure of lesser amounts of money at critical points in a pavement's life. Pavement preservation pays off in both the short and long term. Experience indicates that spending a dollar on pavement preservation can eliminate or delay spending \$6 to \$10 on future rehabilitation or reconstruction costs.

Seal Coats Essential

Seal coats, or "chip seals" as they also are known, are an essential part of Bexar County's program. There, use of a new high-performance asphalt emulsion for seal coats is providing Bexar County's urban road users more durable chip seals, less disruption to traffic in an urban area and significantly fewer broken windshields.

"Chip seals are economical and are one of the better treatments you can use to preserve pavements," Vasquez

said. "With chip seals, we get a thick coat of asphalt with a durable Grade 5 trap rock. With that combination, our roads stay in great shape, which minimizes potholes, and the aggregate lasts from eight to 12 years."

Bexar County applies a fundamental tenet of pavement preservation: for the lowest-cost, long-term performance, treat roads *before* they show distress. "When we go back after that initial period, the chip seal will still be in good condition and we will apply another chip seal," Vasquez said. "We are proactive in our pavement preservation and chip seals are part of that."

Vasquez is responsible for the day-to-day operations of its public works service centers, from which some 200 employees care for and preserve pavements and bridges, but also install signage, stripe rights-of-way, undertake drainage and vegetation management, mosquito control and much more.

Bexar County owns approximately 2,400 lane miles, nearly all of which are paved. "We try to chip seal about 100 centerline miles of pavement per year, between 1.5 and 2 million square yards," Vasquez said. Chip seals are done by county forces.

Use of igneous trap rock is an important part of the mix, he said. Despite an abundance of high-quality limestone deposits in Bexar County – the San Antonio metro area sits at the foot of the Balcones Escarpment and is the center of an active cement manufacturing industry – the county uses 3/8-in. crushed basalt instead of limestone.

"We prefer the trap rock because it's a harder rock," Vasquez said. "When it's put down it's a light gray, but after about six months it turns black and looks like hot mix asphalt. We've learned constituents find that to be aesthetically pleasing. When you combine that with its superior skid resistance, trap rock is the right choice."

High-Performance Chip Seals

In the field, Bexar County uses the Grade 5 trap rock with 0.3 gallons per square yard of emulsion, applying 15 to 16 pounds per square yard of aggregate. The placement is followed by seating of crushed basalt chips with a pneumatic roller. Bexar County typically does not sweep immediately after placement but does the next day.

"The emulsion breaks in minutes," Vasquez said. "We shoot it

and lay the chips after a minute. It doesn't take long for the emulsion to break and you can walk, or drive on it in a forward and backward motion, right after the chips go down." Turning motions will displace the aggregate, though, until the emulsion is properly cured.

Traffic is permitted about a half hour after the chip seal has been rolled.

Even though the seal isn't swept until the next day, windshield complaints are minimal, Vasquez said. "We calibrate our equipment, and when you strictly control the amount of aggregate that we put down and use an emulsion



FP2 President Mike Buckingham presents Bexar County Public Works Operations Manager Tony Vasquez with 2012 James B. Sorenson Award for Excellence in Pavement Preservation in August 2012. Photo courtesy of FP2 Inc.



Pneumatic rollers seat basalt chips into high-performance cationic emulsion. Photo courtesy of BASF Corp.

with high chip-retention, you minimize claims. I don't recall a claim in all of 2011."

When necessary, the county will do a trial run on a chip seal candidate to determine optimum dosage of chips, in which just enough are placed to cover the pavement, with little to none left over, also minimizing aggregate loss.

While chip seals have been a long-time choice for preserving Bexar County pavements, the county recently enhanced chip seal performance by adopting use of a new cationic, high-float, rapid-set emulsion.

"We used it for the first time in 2011 and it's become the only emulsion we will use," Vasquez said. "Our paving foreman, Sam Joiner, commented that he has seen an improvement in chip retention, that our sweepings are a lot fewer as he does not see those chips coming off, and we are able to get traffic back on the pavement a lot sooner."

Bexar County was using a CHFRS-2P asphalt emulsion from Ergon Asphalt & Emulsions, Inc. That language denotes a cationic, high-float, rapid-set emulsion in the No. 2 viscosity range with polymer added. The polymer Bexar County uses is *Butonal NX 1122* from BASF Corporation. Previously the county used a CRS-2P emulsion.

"Use of the new CHFRS-2P emulsion is part of our continuous effort to improve operations," Vasquez said. "We did a pilot program two years ago and tried it on one pavement. It worked so well we decided to try it extensively this year and our foreman noticed a lot better chip retention right away."

The emulsion handles in much the same way as the emulsion the county used previously, he said. "The CHFRS-2P handles the same as the CRS-2P," Vasquez said. "Our guys have extensive experience in handling

the emulsions and I did not see any difference in handling between the two."

Pavement Management Program

The chip seal program exists within an overall pavement management program for Bexar County.

"In 2005 we did a visual inspection of all our pavements using the PASER (*Pavement Surface Evaluation and Ratings*) system, which uses a rating of 1 to 10," Vasquez said. "We put those ratings into our geographic information systems and applied color codings to the ratings."

With that as a basis, the county moved to the next stage. "In 2007, we implemented a Cartegraph asset management system," Vasquez said. "A consultant did a pavement data inventory – measuring

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distress data such as cracking, rutting and ride indices – and used them to come up with an overall condition index (OCI). We try to do that every three years, and in 2011 undertook our second round of data collection.”

A data collection van is used to gather the information at highway speeds. “Using the OCI we program different maintenance strategies into a software module, which gives us different budget scenarios for different treatments on different pavements,” Vasquez said. “You can create a plan for however long you want, but we plan for three years because that’s our evaluation cycle. Right now we are planning for the cycle from 2012 to 2015.”

Because the county has GIS capabilities, the plan can be displayed on a county map as well, which greatly enhances planning capabilities and the ability to communicate the program to county administration and to citizens.

“Our overall condition rating is at 90.46, on a scale of zero to 100, up from the high 80s about three years ago,” Vasquez said. “My goal is to keep the OCI above 90 and focus on specific types of distress that we have. If there is rutting we will reconstruct the road



In Bexar County, 3/8-in. crushed basalt chips immediately follow placement of cationic, high-float, rapid-set emulsion. Photo courtesy of BASF Corp.

or do something that will remove the cause of the rutting.”

With use of pavement preservation in the context of asset management – by which agencies protect their investment in their infrastructure – materials like Bexar County’s high-performance asphalt emulsion can help agencies preserve more miles, in the same amount of time. ★

FORT WORTH:

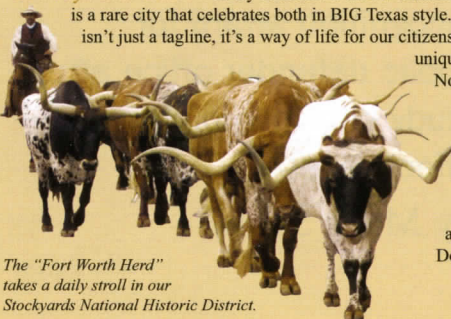
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The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

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