

Frequently Asked Questions about Seal Coats

What is a seal coat? A seal coat is a preventive maintenance surface treatment designed to preserve and extend the life of a street. It protects an aging pavement surface and seals up small cracks to keep water out of the pavement. The process starts by spraying a thin layer of liquid asphalt over the pavement. It is followed by the spreading of a thin layer of small rock. The surface is then rolled with a rubber tire roller and the street is reopened to traffic. Excess gravel is swept up by a vacuum street sweeper soon thereafter. It takes about a couple of months for the new surface to completely cure and lock the surface firmly into place with the road open to regular traffic.

Why was the seal coat done? Asphalt streets consist of a 1½ to 2 inch layer of asphaltic concrete most people just call asphalt or pavement. Over time, the asphalt ages, weathers, and oxidizes. It becomes brittle and cracks. While the old surface appears smooth, it contains hairline cracks that, if not treated, would continue to widen, deepen and eventually form potholes. Proper preventive maintenance, including seal coating, can help ensure that the existing pavement structure will last for many decades.

How long does a seal coat take? On most streets the work will only take about 30 minutes per block per lane. There might be a short period of time when the roadway in front of a residence is in an active work zone and, for safety reasons, the driveway is inaccessible. The first sweeping does not take place for 24 to 48 hours, so drivers should drive slowly. The surface is still “tender” for the remainder of the curing process. Tight turns, quick accelerations, or sudden stops and heavy braking may leave permanent marks in the surface in the first few months, especially on very hot days.

The street was swept, but why is there still a lot of gravel scattered around? We do not tow vehicles for the seal coat operation. If residents are unable to assist us by moving vehicles off the street, the sweepers will be unable to vacuum the rock from under them. Loose gravel also tends to accumulate at low spots, on the outside of curves and at intersections; however, all of this typically amounts to less than a gallon of gravel per block, and we would be glad to clean up remaining rock. If concerned residents will contact the resurfacing hotline, we will come back to sweep up any excess rock (512-943-3393) within 24 – 48 hours.

Why did you stop at the cul-de-sacs? Tandem axle, double tire, garbage trucks make sharp turns in cul-de-sac bubbles and cut into a fresh seal coat thereby peeling up large sections of the surface. This is especially true in hotter weather. We will come back later with a different process to treat those areas. This other process is called a fog seal. Fog seals work better with the heavy, slow-speed turns at the end of the street.

What about the areas skipped where cars were parked? We ask that each resident help maintain the quality of their street by moving vehicles parked on the street in advance of the seal coat work. In the cases where residents have not moved their vehicles, seal coat production will be reduced and we will be back with a hand crew to cover those spaces at a later date. This will be more expensive and result in fewer streets that can be seal coated that year.

The seal coat surface is too rough. My kids can't roller blade and my dog can't walk in the street. What can be done to smooth it out? The surface will smooth out with traffic over the first four to six weeks as the material cures and the gravel particles interlock and embed into a tighter surface. While this process is slow, it is happening. The street will look completely different in eight to twelve weeks with a darker, tighter, smoother surface. It will never be as smooth as the old surface; however, it will provide good wet weather traction, preserve the remaining life of the street, and seal most of the cracks.

When can I walk on the asphalt again? It is best to wait at least 30 minutes after rock has been down before walking on the new pavement surface. Remember that the curing process takes longer than 30 minutes so, if you choose to walk outside, be sure to remove shoes before going back in your house and make sure that all pets' feet are clean before going back in, as well.

How often do you need to do seal coat maintenance? Seal Coat Maintenance is often performed on an 8 – 10 year basis. If preventive maintenance, crack sealing and seal coat resurfacing, e.g., is conducted on Williamson County roads and streets on a routine basis, the existing pavement structure will last for many decades.

Why not pave the street with material like the one we already have? What is the difference in cost? What the residents are used to driving on is a pavement structure that has a hot mix asphalt pavement (HMACP) surface with a flexible crushed rock base below it. The cost to resurface an existing road using a standard HMACP overlay is 5 to 6 times more expensive than resurfacing a road with a seal coat. Should the roads not be resurfaced at all, they will continue to degrade and there comes a point when resurfacing maintenance is no longer effective and the road would need to be rebuilt. The cost to rebuild a road is 10 - 15 times greater than the cost of seal coating.

Where else have they used the seal coat process? The City of Austin resurfaces all residential streets and most boulevards using a seal coat. To see recent seal coat applications, you may wish to drive through Shenandoah, Block House Creek or Brushy Creek North subdivisions.

My street was just resurfaced. Is this the final product? Yes and No. Yes, this is the product that is being utilized to resurface all subdivision roads in the unincorporated areas of Williamson County. As expressed earlier in the FAQs, it is much more cost effective to resurface with a seal

coat than with HMA CP, due the County's budget constraints. No, what you see on your street the day of resurfacing is not how it will look in the future. We spread more rock than is necessary to decrease the likelihood that residents would get asphalt on their vehicles and feet. That excess rock will be vacuumed up (it might take a couple of trips down your street) and the remaining rock (that which adhered to the asphalt) will continue to work itself into a tighter structure with continued driving upon it. The rock will also tend to darken over time.

Two different seal coats of varying ages: on the LEFT is a seal coat approximately a couple months old, while the one on the RIGHT is approximately 4 years old.



4-year-old seal coat: Talleyran Dr.



Where do I go for more information? You may call our Resurfacing Hotline, 512-943-3393, to hear daily updates of roads on which our crews are currently working or you may visit our county website at www.wilco.org/roads.