



## ROAD WORK AHEAD

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Are you wasting money, or possibly even shortening the lifespan of your blacktop?

**To help shed light on the subject, here are some key points of when, how, why, and who you should plan on maintaining your pavement.**

In the past decade as our workforce loses out to foreign competition, many people have decided to go into business for themselves. A very easy and lucrative business is asphalt sealing. A person can get started with as little investment as a couple hundred dollars and no experience. This has led to even more problems in an industry that is already marked with scars from bad ethics and scrupulous scams. Until wide spread use of the Internet, consumers have been limited to educating themselves regarding pavement maintenance through the actual installers. The problem is, most of these "get rich quick" installers have little knowledge themselves.

**Let's explore and offer some answers to the most common questions:**

1.) Q. **Should seal coating be performed on an annual basis?**

A. No. Sealing your asphalt too much can lead to many problems. Many seal coating installers will lead you to believe otherwise. However, the first two coats of sealer applied to your asphalt are what really protect it. Anything after this is usually for cosmetic purposes. Sealer applied annually tends to crack and flake after about 10 years of annual applications or less and may even crack the surface of the pavement. This may influence the owner to resurface prematurely. To sum up, too much maintenance is not a good return on investment. Other problems caused by over sealing are tracking, creating slippery surfaces, and a creating a smaller balance in your checkbook.

2.) Q. **Is it better to apply sealer in hot weather?**

A. No. While this is true for paving, it's not appropriate for sealing. Remember, asphalt can get so hot under the hot summer sun; it can nearly burn your skin. This also causes the sealer to dry too quickly. When sealer dries too quickly it can peel, flake, or get a streaky finish. If you must apply sealer in temperatures above 90 degrees, a good installer will spray the surface with a light mist of water first. This will cool the surface considerably. Ideal air temperatures are between 60 and 90 degrees.

3.) Q. **Sealer is all the same, why shouldn't I choose a less expensive bid?**

A. There are far more variables to the sealcoating industry than consumers realize. Most directly influence the differences in quoted prices. First off, there are different brands and differences in the quality of sealers available to contractors. A good contractor will choose a good product even if it's more expensive that he knows will give years of good protection and value. Second sealer is water-borne (also called emulsion). Therefore it can be easily over-diluted with water to save the contractor money, or not diluted as specified by the manufacturer to provide a superior, durable, product. Unfortunately, there is hardly any way for a consumer to tell what the water content is in sealer (unless it's so over-diluted it looks "watery" or "runny" Sealer should have a consistency like a pancake batter, maybe thicker. Most good applications will have an average of 10%-25% water dilution rate. This is acceptable. This

is a big reason consumers should choose a reputable contractor with a good guarantee and who has references over a year old in your area. Usually a good installer will be more expensive because he doesn't over dilute his material, he will use a better quality product, he may use specialty additives which greatly improve the sealer, he has all the required insurances and licensing to be in business, pays his well-trained employees a fair wage to do a good job, and will stand behind the work with a guarantee. Shoddy contractors almost never have any insurance, offer a low price to get a large volume of work, hire cheap inexperienced labor, dilute the material heavily, and will never offer any guarantees once paid.

4.) Q. **Surface cracks always seem to come back, so why bother filling them?**

A. Inexperienced or unethical contractors will shy away from filling cracks. It is important to seal cracks especially in climates that are subjected to freezing temperatures with a quality, usually hot-applied (375°F) product made especially for crack sealing BEFORE seal coating. Even after seal coating unsealed cracks will allow water in that can cause damage to pavement if permitted to get down into the pores of blacktop or worse into the base under the asphalt causing "frost heaving" requiring expensive repairs. Qualified installers will know exactly the best solution to treat cracks before seal coating and will be glad to explain it to you. Proper crack sealing will last the life of the sealcoating and the cracks won't "come back".

5.) Q. **Can I save some money by doing it myself?**

A. At one point, some courageous homeowners (and very few commercial property owners) will try to personally sealcoat their pavement. Stop for a second and add up the total costs you will incur by undertaking this project. Sealer by the pail costs 4-5 times more at improvement stores (and is not of the same quality as properly mixed commercial sealer). Tools available to homeowners are often expensive and not up to the performing the task properly. Also proper cleaning is a major component of a good sealcoating job. A leaf blower or garden hose just can't do the job professional blowers or washers will. (There are also other factors like the possible need for priming of oil spots or other "specialty products" that do not have "homeowner" grade equivalent products available) Figure on ruining a whole outfit from your shoes all the way to shirt & gloves. You may have to persuade somebody to help you, which could cost additional money. On average this will take you at least four to five times longer than a professional. On a 1,200 square foot driveway you can expect to fork out around \$300.00+ for the supplies listed above. That doesn't include your labor (what you would make hourly at your job?). Plus it is highly doubtful that you would do half as good a job as a professional. By today's rates, most professional jobs will cost less or only a few dollars more than doing it yourself. (depending on the cost of other needs like crack sealing which you couldn't do yourself)

6.) Q. **Should the sealer be applied by spray or squeegee?**

A. Here is another reason you should rely on a real professional to come up with a solution for your specific needs. Both application types are suitable under the right circumstances. There is no "one size fits all" method of seal coating. A true professional will determine the process based on of age, degree of deterioration, climate, expected use, budget, term of ownership, obstacles, and how many coats already exist on the pavement and suggest the method best for *your* pavement. It can be one method or the other or sometimes both!

**The main purpose of this article is to influence the consumer to research and make an educated decision when maintaining asphalt surfaces.** Do not make an impulsive decision based solely on price. The first thing you should do is be sure your contractor has an upstanding report with the BBB. They should be "known" in your area. Make sure they are well established by investigating whether they have a local address, an advertisement in the yellow pages and a website. It also wouldn't hurt to get several bids, and actually check references on all of them. Keep in mind you usually get what you pay for.

**A well-paved blacktop surface can last 20-40 years if maintained at proper intervals.**

**Save money by hiring a reputable, paving or sealing contractor. They can develop a strategy to maintain your pavement.**

**Spending a little more now, can save you a lot down the road.**