

## **“CAUTION”**

### **Over-Application of Pavement Crack Seal May Be a Hazard to Motorcyclists**

Hello to all of my friends and fellow riders. My topic for this month is a topic that every rider should take very seriously this time of year. The State, County and City road crews are out in full force applying what we call, “Rubber or Road Snakes”. These little critters have no feelings and will eat you alive. Last month we had one of our fellow riders go down on the road from LaVerkin to the I-15 interchange. A week before, while attending the SUHOG Rider Orientation class, some of us rode this route. As I rounded the curve, I noticed the tire slippage and loss of traction immediately. These conditions will worsen as the temperature starts to rise. Another known area of concern is the road going south out of the Brian Head Resort in Iron County. There are literally hundreds of these road hazards within our area. While encountering these conditions, please remember to square your bike up and slow down to a speed that is safe. Don't rely on the posted speed limit as these conditions may require a lower speed than posted, to be safe. Be careful while riding at night. Excessive crack seal is difficult to see at night.

In the past 4 years, I have known 5 people that have experienced the art of laying down their bikes because of excessive crack seal that was applied on asphalt roads. This is a very dangerous situation to a motorcycle rider, especially when this material is applied around curves. Not only is this a problem right here in our own back yard, (Washington County), it's a national problem. As the weather starts to warm and the temperature of our roads start to increase, this hazard becomes intensified as the crack seal material softens and gets very slick.

State, County and City road maintenance crews frequently seal joints or repair cracks in a paved roadway with asphalt / rubber cement, a pliable material that is replaced in cracks to keep water from entering the cracks and destroying the sub-grade material and eventually causing the asphalt pavement to fail. Recent complaints suggest that when asphalt cement applications become too wide, or too thick, the crack sealer may cause motorcycle tires to skid and could result in injury or death to motorcycle riders.

A past article entitled "Falling Through the Cracks" in a December issue of American Motorcyclist, described a crash in which strips of asphalt cement crack sealer contributed to the death of an experienced motorcyclist. This is a summary of that article.

Mark Loggains was 33 years old and he was a long-time motorcyclist. Riding in the evening rain, Loggains drove onto a recently repaired section of highway. His rear tire broke loose in an area where strips of asphalt cement ranging from 4.5- inches to 9-inches wide had been used to seal the pavement. The bike went down, spun, crossed into the opposing lane of traffic, and struck a tractor trailer. Loggains died in the crash.

Loggains' fellow motorcyclist believed slippery asphalt cement sealer caused the crash; and, according to the article, some highway experts agree. Sean Maher of the American Motorcycle Association's (AMA's) legislative affairs office has been working to make state highway departments aware of the dangers of over-applications of asphalt cement.

Maher talked with the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), since many states follow ASTM standards in setting roadway repair procedures. ASTM officials agree that asphalt cement can be slippery. Their opinion is that it will cause problems only when it is misapplied.

Maher also talked with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Recognizing the hazard, the FHWA sent an alert letter to their field representatives in all fifty states informing them of the potential danger to motorcyclists caused by wide patches of asphalt crack cement.

Thousands of motorcyclists had specifically complained to the AMA about dangerous asphalt cement repairs in the states of New York, California, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Utah. Maher wrote letters to each of these states, and he received responses from several.

New York issued a stop-work order on all crack-filling projects while asphalt cement repairs were inspected. The New York Department of Transportation's chief engineer and assistant commissioner wrote, "Early indications suggest most of the problems relate to over-application--that is, the bands of crack-filler material were installed too wide, too long, and too thick. The material 'gives' with increasing thickness, and if placed too thick could cause the loss of traction that you report." He added, "If in the future we find correctly sealed cracks objectionable, we will explore more costly methods of crack sealing in order to provide a more stable riding surface for motorcyclists."

The California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) promised "additional emphasis" on crack-sealing issues. CalTrans emphasized, "Sand is often applied to reduce the 'grabbing' effect that can occur when a sealed pavement joint or crack is traversed by a motorcycle." Utah promised "ongoing tests concerning crack-sealing material and construction issues." In Ohio, where Mark Loggains died, the Ohio Department of Transportation has set its standard for applications of asphalt cement to be "no more than 5 inches wide."

AMA requests that motorcyclists who have problems with hazardous asphalt cement pavement sealing, to contact the department of transportation in their state. AMA would like to receive copies of such letters to state officials. The copies should be sent to:

AMA Government Relations Department, 33 Collegeview Road, Westerville, OH 43081-1484.  
The telephone number is: 614 891-2425.

Below are local representatives that you can contact if you find an area of road that is a safety concern for all motorcyclists. Please take the time and write these reps with your concerns. It may save a life.

Utah Department of Transportation  
4501 South 2700 West  
Mail Stop 141200  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-1200  
Hours: Monday – Thursday, 7 am to 6 pm  
Telephone: 801-965-4000  
E-mail: [srwebmail@utah.gov](mailto:srwebmail@utah.gov)

Washington County Roads Supervisor: Ron Whitehead  
Phone: (435)634-5736  
E-mail: [Ron.Whitehead@washco.utah.gov](mailto:Ron.Whitehead@washco.utah.gov)

Contact Info: Washington County Commission  
Address: 197 East Tabernacle St.  
St. George, UT 84770  
Phone: 435-634-5700  
E-mail: [help@washco.utah.gov](mailto:help@washco.utah.gov)

Chairman: James J. Eardley  
E-mail: [Jim.Eardley@washco.utah.gov](mailto:Jim.Eardley@washco.utah.gov)

Commissioner: Alan D. Gardner  
E-mail: [Alan.Gardner@washco.utah.gov](mailto:Alan.Gardner@washco.utah.gov)

Commissioner: Dennis B. Drake  
E-mail: [Denny.Drake@washco.utah.gov](mailto:Denny.Drake@washco.utah.gov)