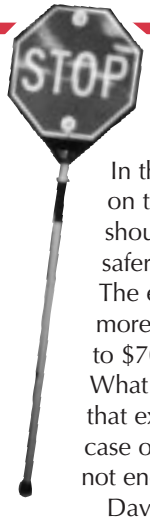
Idea Exchange



Halogen Stop/Slow paddle outshines the rest

In theory, flashing lights on the Stop/Slow paddle should make work zones safer for flaggers and crews. The extra safety also costs more: $175-$325 compared to $70 for a passive paddle. What are you getting for that extra investment? In the case of most lighted paddles, not enough.

Dave Morena, Safety & Traffic Operations Engineer, Michigan FHWA Division office field tested five different flashing Stop/Slow paddles for a group of federal, state, and local highway safety people. "The results were dramatic," Morena says. In bright sunlight at 285 feet from the observers, only the paddle with halogen lights was visible.

"The group consensus was that the halogen paddle was the only one that would be able to draw a motorist's attention not just at 285 feet, but at the even greater distances required in the field," says Morena. Subsequent tests with two halogen paddles confirmed these findings.

Michigan DOT has supplied halogen Stop/Slow paddles to its road crews for the last six years. After a near miss, John Dault, a Transportation Maintenance Worker in the Superior Region, is very glad. He was working on a winding road section when suddenly a semi came barreling in from the west where traffic was supposed to be stopped.

"I immediately activated the Electronic Sign Paddle," Dault says. "Only skidding tires could be heard. The monster was halted…only 25 feet from the patch crew that occupied the lane. When I approached the driver…he stuttered: 'I never seen anything till the lights started to flash!'"

Despite their effectiveness, the halogen lighted paddles aren't widely used, even though both Michigan DOT and Minnesota DOT have them in service. Cost may be a factor. They are priced at $325 each by Minncor Industries, a Minnesota vendor, and at $530 by DeTronics, an Ontario company.

In Wisconsin, Mashuda Contractors in Princeton started using a set of them in July. "They're really good. I think they should use them in all areas where there is high traffic or low visibility," says Safety Director Deb Hilscher. "They're highly visible and help protect the flagger. Flaggers need all the protection they can get because they're right out in the traffic."

Hilscher says the paddles are also much more reliable than a previous model of lighted paddle they tried. The batteries last a full work day and then are recharged overnight.

"It comes down to spending extra money to get extra safety for the workers," says Morena of the Michigan FHWA. "What's worse, though, is to spend extra money and get nothing. You can spend $250-$325 for the LED paddles and you can't see them at all."

For information on the field test contact Dave Morena at 517/702-1836. For product information contact Minncor Industries at 800/646-6267 or DeTronics Ltd. at 905/640-1216.

Do you have an idea that could help another streets or highway agency? Tell us about it. Call, fax, write or e-mail and we'll help share your idea with others.

Bid docs *from page 1*

conformance with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation Standard Specifications for Road and Bridge Construction. Local officials will need to make some additional specification decisions because the standard has many options, some of which are not appropriate for local roads. For example, the specs say asphalt materials may conform to mix type specifications: E-0.3, E-1, E-3, or E-10. Most local roads would benefit by conforming to low volume specifications, E-0.3. Materials designed for very high volume roads are generally not appropriate.

It is important to be clear in bid documents who will do patching and repairs before the sealcoat or overlay is applied.

Doing your specification writing homework up front can save you headaches at construction season. Good specs make for good roads.

Sample specifications and bidding documents for small projects are available through the T.I.C. See Resources on page 6 for details.

Crossroads

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