*Manhole safety ramps make for smoother utility construction projects*

# *Filling a* VOID

By Angus W. Stocking

*Don Hathaway is a division manager for S.T. Wooten Corp., a North Carolina-based paving firm that operates 13 asphalt plants and 17 concrete plants out of eight offices. Hathaway has managed several trenching, milling and paving jobs in his career, and until recently, he had a major problem with related insurance claims.*

"When you go into a populated area and lay utilities, you have to expose the rims on manholes," Hathaway said. "Then people hit them and bust tires and bust rims, and that leads to a lot of insurance claims."

## Beyond the Standard

Hathaway was trying to reduce claims by creating a smooth buffer around the exposed rims on his trenching, milling and paving projects, but the standard method was not working well.

"We used to wrap them with hot mix," he said. "It worked, but there's nothing to hold it in place. It can take two weeks or so before we get back to pave, and in that time the mix would break up and the buffer would disappear."

There could also be a delay between rim exposure and applying the hot mix. Furthermore, working with hot mix was tedious, time-consuming and if it did not expose workers to traffic, it led to longer lane closures. All that, and still the standard method was not reducing claims significantly.

Hathaway spotted a solution at a Las Vegas tradeshow. The manhole safety ramp from American Highway Products, Ltd. (AHP) is a heavy-duty beveled ring made of 100% recycled rubber and weighing about 60 lb. After manholes have been raised to final grade or when a road has been milled but the road surface not yet lifted to match, workers drop the product over the utility rim.

The ramp covers a manhole rim's sharp corners, protects the manhole frame from displacement—which can cause project delays—and provides a solid, smooth transition from the original surface to the manhole lid. Drivers are immediately protected from broken tires and wheels, and contractors are immediately "immunized" against insurance claims.

## Cost & Installation Benefits

Hathaway said that as a rule of thumb, he saves about $75 every time he uses a ramp instead of hot mix. The ramps meet several ASTM standards, including ASTM D412 for tension strength and elongation and ASTM D2240 for hardness. The certified durability means that the products can be reused for years. "They don't deteriorate," Hathaway said. "I have had some stolen, but I have never had one break or fall apart."

Labor is saved at the beginning and end of the project. To install the manhole safety ramp, workers simply drop it over the exposed rim. The ramps are solid, held in place by the rim itself and made with a grippy base so that they do not shift or slip while in use. Additionally, the products are stackable for storage.

Hathaway said that his staff prefers using the ramps. "They don't have to lay the hot mix, and they don't have to come back later with a pick and shovel to clean it up. They just pick up the ramp and throw it in the truck," he said.

AHP manhole safety ramps come in four sizes—48-in. outer diameter with 31-in. inside clearance; 48-in. with 28-in. inside clearance; 48-in. with 26-in. inside clearance; and 29-in. with 10-in. inside clearance—all of which are 2 in. thick. Hathaway keeps about 150 on hand to rotate into projects as needed.

The best part for Hathaway and his group was that insurance claims stopped right away. "We used [the manhole safety ramps] on our first project two years ago," he said, "and that was our very first project without a claim. I know they are a great product."

Manhole safety ramps create a win-win-win situation for drivers, contractors and manholes. WWD

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## ARTICLE SUMMARY

**Challenge:** Utility construction projects generally require that manhole rims be exposed, subjecting vehicles to damage, and thus, contractors to insurance claims.

**Solution:** Rather than wrap exposed rims in hot mix, many project leaders are opting to have workers drop a manhole safety ramp in place to immediately protect motorists and their vehicles.

**Conclusion:** Manhole safety ramps are easy to install, and they help prevent costly, time-consuming insurance claims.

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