

# Anti-skid covers can save lives

*For many years, the subject of polished manhole covers and highway castings has always raised eyebrows. These hazards have become polished over the years by traffic and are now under scrutiny as a contributing factor to road accidents.*

There is a serious concern that due to current spending cuts, the focus on road safety and casualty reduction will effectively become a victim itself. During 2010, 1,857 road users were killed and 20,803 seriously injured on the UK's road network. This figure shows a positive reduction from the previous year by 365 and 3,887 people respectively. The costs associated with retaining this progress cannot be sustained within the current financial climate and consideration must be given to cost effective solutions to support the good work already achieved by road safety and highways officers.

It is equally difficult for highways managers to pinpoint where their focus should be, however, it is agreed that highway utility castings are of great concern to those categories of road user that are most at risk, such as cyclists, motorcyclists and equestrians. Recent developments have led to an opportunity to change the way we see and use this necessary hardware, especially in respect of structural design and skid/slip resistance.

Several organisations have addressed this issue, by policy change, to declare that utility castings should have a degree of in-service skid resistance that can be maintained throughout the products working life. In November 2007, the Highways Agency published an advisory notice (HA104/08) for UK trunk roads, to include a specification for a polished skid resistance value (PSRV) for castings within their responsibility. Other notices and

specifications now exist to deal with roads under the remit of the local highways authority etc.

Several products are available, which provide some degree of value for money, but usually require the costly excavation and reinstatement of the existing casting, causing disruption to an already cluttered highway network and creating further risks to users and road workers in the process.

Performed Markings Ltd, the UK's leading supplier of preformed thermoplastic road markings and road safety products, has spent 4 years working closely with the casting industry, the asset owners and the highways managers to provide a cost effective solution to slip resistance to new and existing highway castings.

Premark Anti-Skid is a preformed thermoplastic material that provides an enhancement to all castings, regardless of material (Grey Iron/Ductile/Steel) or profile. Installation is usually completed within 30 minutes to an hour, limiting disruption to road users, and reducing the risk for highway contractors. The application creates an immediate equilibrium between the slip resistance of the road surface and the casting.

Testing by independent UKAS accredited testing facilities provide confirmation that the material can achieve all of the performance requirements specified in the various codes, including HA104/08, in fact recent test results indicate a much

greater enhancement than previously anticipated and recorded.

Premark Anti-Skid has been installed on some of the UK's busiest routes alongside other enhanced covers. Highway managers suggest that the performance of Premark Anti-Skid is comparable with other systems, but at a much lower cost. A recent DOT study into rural road safety in Norfolk, confirms a similar performance of the product, in comparison to much more costly solutions. In addition, the application of the material does not conceal any of the identification markings, in respect of cover use or its specification, an important factor to large asset owners.

The installation, on the A140 Norwich to Cromer road, required permission from BT, who have continually supported the development of the material after trials highlighted not only the performance of the material, but how the identity of the cover was retained. This was also the case with Thames Water, where a 12 month trial has been extremely successful.

Premark Anti-Skid is now available pre-applied, directly from the market leading casting manufacturers, after gaining support from BS1 that the application of this enhancement does not interfere or infringe the quality standard of traditional castings, indeed, the industry has welcomed the opportunity to offer enhanced products, that will contribute to road safety, and will ultimately save lives during these frugal times.