

Seal coating on State Highway 19 caused windshield damage

By Brynn Fitzsimmons The Courier reporter | Posted: Wednesday, September 7, 2016 4:52 pm

Seal coating on roads is a regular occurrence during Wisconsin summers, but the State Highway 19 seal coating in the stretch between Waterloo and Watertown caused an irregular number of problems.

“There are several dozen people complaining,” Stephanie Gabrus of Waterloo said.

She said her husband drives State Highway 19 every day to work. Their car ended up with two chips and a crack as a result of loose rocks hitting it. Hers is among the dozens of cracked windshields and other vehicle damage reported.

Jefferson County Highway Commissioner Bill Kern, however, said the seal coating process was the same as it has been on other roads.

“It’s nothing different than we’ve done in the past,” he said. The seal coating project the state highway from the Town of Portland to Watertown was completed the week of Aug. 15.

Kern explained that signs were put up alerting drivers to the construction zone and reducing speed to 35 mph. He said following the reduced speed limit is especially important during the first two days after seal coating, as there are loose stones on the road at that time. After 48 hours, he explained the crews can sweep the road and remove a lot of the excess stones.

“Typically, we have no problem,” Kern said.

He speculated that the higher traffic on State Highway 19 as compared to other county roads may have caused the increase in damaged vehicles. He said there was also a serious problem with vehicles not obeying the reduced speed limit.

“Vehicles are not obeying (the speed limit) and going much faster than that, causing the gravel to kick up when they pass people who are going the speed limit,” Gabrus said.

“Speed is a large component,” Kern explained.

Although the county is doing the work, Kern explained they cannot close the state highway without state permission. However, in light of the number of complaints coming into the highway department after the Highway 19 work, Kern said they are exploring the option.

“If we’re going to have these issues, we would much rather close the roadway,” he said.

Gabrus said she was told she could file a claim with the county's insurance, but that "more than likely nothing would come of it," she said.

Kern said the insurance would evaluate whether the county had done anything wrong or abnormal in their seal coating of the road and approve claims accordingly.

"Several dozen windshields cracked make a good case for something not being done correctly," Gabrus said.

Anyone wishing to file a complaint can contact Jefferson County Highway Department at 920-674-7265.