FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT POTHOLES

CDOT
CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

What causes potholes?

Potholes are caused by the freeze-thaw cycle. When moisture seeps into pavement, it expands when it freezes and contracts when it thaws. This flexing of the pavement, combined with the melted water and the stress of vehicular traffic, causes pavement to deteriorate and potholes to form.

Where do potholes occur?

Chicago has more than 3,800 miles of streets, and potholes can occur on any one of them. Potholes tend to appear most on arterial streets (which carry the most vehicles) and under bridges and viaducts, areas where water often collects.

How does CDOT battle potholes?

CDOT has an aggressive program to tackle potholes. The department uses a computerized mapping and tracking system to identify pothole locations and schedule crews most efficiently. Each morning, CDOT's pothole command generates a map of potholes reported to 311. Using that map, managers determine routings for each crew that will allow them to fill the most potholes possible. Night and weekend crews repair high-traffic areas when traffic is lightest, which maximizes efficiency and minimizes traffic impacts.

How many potholes does CDOT fill a day?

That varies daily, depending on the weather. On days when weather is cooperative and there's no precipitation, crews can fill several thousand potholes. Fallling snow or freezing rain severely limits the ability of crews to make repairs, and limits the effectiveness of the asphalt patching material.

How long does a pothole repair last?

It depends on many factors, including traffic volume. Repairs can last a few days, a few weeks, a few months or more. CDOT uses a high-performance cold patch material formulated to maintain its workability longer, particularly in colder temperatures. This allows the material to properly fill the potholes and allows for better compaction.

What happens if my vehicle is damaged by a pothole?

The Chicago City Clerk's Office handles vehicle damage claims. Visit www.chicityclerk.com or call (312) 744-6861.

What should I do when I see a pothole?

Call 311. The City's non-emergency services number allows CDOT to be customer-driven in filling potholes. Whenever possible, give the 311 operator the most specific location possible--either an exact address (e.g. "In front of 123 Main Street") or a block ("Main Street between Elm and Oak.") One call to 311 can generate multiple pothole repairs. When a crew arrives to repair a 311 pothole, it fills all the other potholes nearby.

How long does it take to fill a pothole?

It varies, but repairs are generally completed within 3-6 days from the first report of a pothole to 311. Weather influences how long a repair takes--especially when frigid temps and precipitation prevent our full force of crews from performing repairs. The location of the pothole also influences the time required to repair--arterial streets are completed before residential streets. During peak winter months, duration times usually rise.

Is every dip, crack or break in the street considered a pothole?

No. There are different kinds of pavement problems which require different solutions. Potholes are typically irregularly shaped holes of varying depths. Sinking pavement adjacent to a manhole or catch basin is usually a cave-in that requires reconstruction by the Department of Water Management. Square or rectangular pavement problems are often failed utility cuts created when contractors dig into the street. In those cases, CDOT requires contractors to fix the problem at no cost to the taxpayers. Citizens needn't know the difference to make a 311 report--the issue will be referred to the appropriate department. Regardless of the cause of the pavement problem, the City is committed to fixing the problem as quickly as possible.

Potholes

Cave-in

Failed utility cut

Which potholes get fixed first?

CDOT's priority is arterial streets--larger streets that carry the heaviest volumes of traffic. A repair on an arterial street that carries tens of thousands of vehicles daily will take priority over a residential street that carries far fewer vehicles. However, all potholes are important to us, and every pothole reported to 311 will be fixed.

Does the city do anything to prevent potholes?

Absolutely. Each year, Chicago paves dozens of miles of arterial and residential streets. Repaving extends the lifespan of a street many years. In 2009, Chicago received funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to repave more than 31 miles of the most pothole-plagued arterial streets. Additionally, CDOT repaved more than 400 blocks of residential streets. This repaving helps us stay ahead of the pothole problem.

Why not use concrete to build streets instead of asphalt?

Three main reasons: cost, installation and maintenance.

Cost--A typical city street is built with a concrete base and an asphalt surface. The lifespan of the base can be extended many years by resurfacing. Additionally, resurfacing prolongs the life of streets for a significantly lower cost than complete reconstruction.

Installation--Asphalt installation can occur in hours, vs. days for concrete installation, allowing same-day reopening of the street to traffic. The flexibility of asphalt allows for smooth transitions to the numerous pre-existing fixed points that must be met (curb and gutters, ADA ramps, manholes, existing drainage structures, etc.)

Maintenance--More than 60,000 utility cuts occur annually in order to service underground infrastructure--water, sewer, gas, electrical, etc.. Asphalt accommodates patching more effectively than concrete, and helps maintain a uniform driving surface. Asphalt provides a quick and effective repair. Concrete repairs are usually more expensive and time-consuming.