

Who ya gonna call? Pothole Busters

Ray Martin

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Public works staged a two-day blitz Friday and Saturday in an effort to alleviate the number of potholes across the city.



A city works crew fills potholes on Queen Street near Groh Avenue. The city has established a pothole hotline at 740-4671.

Public works staff in Cambridge just can't catch a break this winter. Mother nature is hammering city streets, regional roads and provincial highways this winter and the department has been busy either plowing snow or filling potholes on 700 kilometres of road they are responsible for maintaining.

"It's not been this bad in quite a while," said Phil Dechene, city director of public works.

On Friday, city staff launched a two-day blitz to tackle as many of the pesky potholes as possible.

"The continuous temperature swings that have caused thawing and refreezing conditions have been extremely hard on the roads," Dechene said. "Last year, we only had two to three weeks of this, this year it seems like it's every other week."

During the blitz, two work crews patched roads around the clock in different parts of the city.

"Part of the problem here is that we have city streets, regional roads and provincial highways, so there are three levels of government, all with different priorities, but people call the city thinking we fix everything,"

Dechene said.

While the city will work on side streets and regional roads as required, parts of Hespeler Road and overpasses on Highway 401, for example, fall under provincial jurisdiction

which means they'll get fixed when the Ministry of Transportation gets to it.

The city is required to do road inspections on a regular basis and makes an inventory of locations.

Required work is logged into a scheduling system to determine priority repairs. Major streets are inspected for all types of deficiencies every few days, while cul-de-sacs might be inspected every six weeks.

While inspectors catch many of the problems, city workers are more commonly alerted by the public.

People wanting to report a pothole problem can call a new "pothole hotline" at 740-7641.

During winter months, teams assign a cold patch, a temporary fix until a more permanent solution is applied in the spring. The city applies approximately 400 tonnes of cold asphalt annually.

One of the most difficult areas for work crews to fix are potholes that appear in major intersections. In an effort to minimize traffic disruption, intersections are fixed during off-peak periods during the day or at night.

"The intersections are the worst," said operations manager Mark Adams. "Very few drivers appreciate what we are trying to do, they just want to get to where they are going and we're in their way. They'll honk their horns, give us the finger and drive right through the lanes we're working on. It can be pretty dangerous."

This year, the city is buying a new asphalt recycler which is supposed to enhance repair capabilities and offer more permanent solutions to the wintertime fixes.

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