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Rollercoaster Weather, Sewer Repairs Slow Pothole Patching Efforts

Up-and-down temperatures, a heavier-than-expected snow and unscheduled sanitary sewer repairs have combined to slow the efforts to make temporary patches to potholes around the city, Boone Public Works Director Waylon Andrews said.

“We’re definitely behind what we anticipated. The quantity is growing, and they’re not getting filled as fast,” Andrews said. “As the weather improves, we’re eager to get out and get some of these situations that have developed over the winter.”

Although asphalt tends to handle the expansion-and-contraction cycle better than concrete, in part because it holds sunlight and heat a little better, there’s no particular part of the city where potholes are better or worse than the others.

Potholes are caused when freezing and thawing temperatures cause pavement and the ground beneath it to expand and contract. Problems are exacerbated when water seeps into the joints or cracks in the pavement. Snowplows can also damage pavement in places, especially in spots where pavement has heaved upward during freezing conditions.

Andrews said in early February that crews were prepared to begin installing temporary patches on potholes as the weather warmed but frigid temperatures soon returned, a Feb. 20 system expected to bring one to three inches of snow dumped 8.5 inches of snow on Boone. In between, public works employees responded to two sanitary sewer ruptures. On top of that, the department has been preparing for stormwater issues that accompany spring rains.

“Springtime usually means crisis management situations for public works,” he explained.

Temporary pothole repairs involve manually pouring hot asphalt into a pothole and tamping down the mixture by hand. Andrews noted that the ground temperatures must rise into the 40- to 50-degree range before the department can deploy its emulsion machine, which sprays and injects materials under pressure to quickly and permanently fill potholes. Andrews continued, “Those temperatures won’t happen for a little while, but temporary patching when the temperature is above freezing and the hole is dry.”

Unfortunately, even on recent days when skies have cleared, melting snow has filled many potholes with water. “Patching doesn’t stick when they’re full of water. We know if water’s sitting in there, it’s just going to freeze and pop the patch back out,” Andrews said.

He encouraged Boone residents to report pothole locations by calling the public works department phone at (515) 432-4211, ext. 1406 or send a message to cangstrom@booneiowa.gov.

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