

An Informed Decision

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Sealcoating, when correctly specified and applied, is cost-effective and beneficial to any restaurant parking lot. A clean, jet-black parking lot with crisp parking stalls can serve as a “welcome mat” for your guests. Most importantly, proper application of the right sealant prolongs the functionality of asphalt pavement and reduces overall maintenance costs by up to 60 percent. In addition, a smooth and even surface aids in sweeping and snow removal.

On the surface, this procedure seems simplistic. But restaurant facility managers should understand that, in actuality, seal coating is a specialty service requiring technical knowledge and precision. Factors such as frequency, material, timing and application are critical to success; of equal importance is contractor selection. The following guide will help restaurant facility managers qualify the right sealcoat contractor for the job.

When soliciting bids, ask contractors the following questions and carefully compare the answers. If you follow a consistent procedure for assessing contractors, you will be able to compare bids on an apples-to-apples basis.

10 questions you should be asking your sealcoat contractor

1. What is the proposed scope of work in the bid? Be clear about what you need the contractor to accomplish. For example, if your pavement has any cracking, be sure the contractor is prepared to fill or seal cracks prior to applying sealant. Crack sealing materials should be specific to area climate as well as the amount of traffic the site incurs. Installation of the product is equally important. Insist that cracks are routed to at least $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in width and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in depth. Crack sealants are designed for installation into the crack. Routing opens small cracks and allows for greater penetration of the sealant. It produces uniform edges on the cracks and better adhesion of the sealant to the sidewalls of the cracks. If you don't specify details such as those listed here, the contractors may not include the extra work or proper materials in their bids.

2. Which product(s) will be used and why? The bids you receive should outline which product(s) are being used and the associated cost. But, dig deeper and ask the contractor why he or she specified certain products. Sealants vary in mix design, and some are better suited than others for certain geographic areas based on varying sub-grade depth and temperature. For example, if your restaurants are located in areas that experience prolonged periods of temperature fluctuations, a premium sealant formula may be ideal. Premium formulas contain polymers that enhance film strength during changes in pavement temperature. Polymer modification helps decrease tearing and cracking due to expansion and contraction of the asphalt. In addition to the basic ingredients, the contractor may add sand to increase traction or additives to accelerate drying. Striping paints and crack sealants can also be affected by climate, so you'll need to ask questions to clearly understand the contractors' recommended materials.

3. How much material will be applied? With most mix designs, at least two coats of sealer should be applied over the entire surface. High-traffic volumes may require a third coat to improve wear in some areas such as drive-through lanes and turn areas. Premium sealcoat products, with longer expected durability, may also be considered to reduce the number of applications over pavement lifespan and minimize downtime that, in turn, increases revenue.

4. What is your technique for applying sealcoat? The contractor should hand spread sealant using a squeegee or brush in corners and edges to “cut in” tight areas and guard against uneven coverage along the perimeter of the parking lot. A quality, full coverage coating can be then be applied with either a squeegee or spray machine.

5. What documentations can you provide? Require that contractors provide insurance certificates, a written warranty or guarantee, references, and Safety and Data Sheets (SDS) or other technical/manufacturer guidelines relating to all products specified in the original scope of work. Review all documentation given to you prior to awarding

business. After all, the ability to produce organized and detailed information may provide you with peace of mind and give one contractor an edge over another.

It is important to carefully consider the people behind the operations as well as the work-flow process before determining which contractor is right for your sealcoat job. Ask contenders the following:

6. What type of training have your sealcoat laborers received? Reputable contractors will be happy to reveal details of their professional training program for crew members. Sealcoating requires specialized knowledge of pavement conditions, including the age of the asphalt, proper drainage, traffic use and traffic flow. It is imperative that the construction crew thoroughly understands how the materials, application equipment and rates, mix design, condition of the asphalt and weather conditions affect the project's successful completion. In addition to contractor-specific training, specialized courses are available, on a national basis, to provide this type of training.

7. What is your communication policy before, during and after the job? An effective seal coating process requires preparation beforehand, coordination during and follow-up after job completion. Your contractor should post notices or otherwise alert management and customers about scheduled sealcoating procedures at least 24 hours before the job begins. Alternate parking or driving routes should be established and communicated 24 hours in advance as well. Crew members should regularly update their supervisor and the restaurant manager during the job at all stages so there are no surprises. After the job is complete, contractors are responsible for alerting customers of changing traffic patterns due to curing time. In general, traffic should be kept off a newly sealed surface for a minimum of 24 hours to allow for drying time. Curing may take up to 30 days, during which minor imperfections in the sealer surface may "heal" or fade as the membrane hardens. If proper cure time is not adhered to, the entire system may be compromised. And, finally, a meeting should be scheduled after job completion to review the work, verify satisfaction and discuss future plans for the site.

8. Will a manager or supervisor be on site? Restaurants are busy facilities and some sites even remain open 24/7. With constant access required, contractors should have the resources available to assign a project manager or supervisor to the jobsite. He or she should help organize the flow of traffic during repairs and address any problems or answer questions as they occur with the onsite restaurant manager. By working with the contractor, the chances of job success are greatly improved.

9. What is your quality-control process to ensure mix design is followed? The contractor should provide manufacturer's data regarding guidelines for application rates, weather conditions and other factors, including the supplier's quality control program. As a spot check of application rates, ask the contractor for the quantities of all materials used and compare them against the manufacturer's recommendations. For large projects, proof of product delivery can be provided to the owner.

10. What can be expected of a long-term partnership? Ask contractors about their value-added benefits. For example, do they provide budget assistance for multi-site portfolios? Can they conduct educational seminars on differing mix designs? Ultimately, your sealcoating contractor should be a reliable and trusted partner that can assist you with immediate needs as well as future pavement planning.

Asking tough questions should be a part of every vendor qualification process. Sealcoating is no exception to the rule. Technical expertise is critical with this procedure. Carefully selecting the right contractor for the job can make a huge impact both on the surface—in terms of visual transformation—and in realizing the cost-saving benefits of preventive pavement care. With this guide, you can be confident in your sealcoat contractor and the results for your restaurants. That will leave you with more time to focus on your core business: feeding your hungry patrons.

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