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Concrete: Asphalt’s Rival?

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Understanding the parking lot relationship

As a college football fan, it’s hard not to get drawn into the hype surrounding heated rivalries every year: Ohio State vs. Arizona State. Billions are spent through the media in anticipation of these games to fan the flames of competition.

The paving industry has a strong rivalry of its own—that between asphalt and concrete. Much of this rivalry stems from the question of which material to use for specific paving projects. In reality, both materials have characteristics for road, parking lot and other paved surface systems.

Tale of the Tape

Let’s consider the benefits of both materials, one by one: **LONGEVITY:** Concrete is a 20-25 year product that requires concrete overlaying, or white topping, over the past five years has helped to extend the life of functionally sound concrete.

Asphalt is a 15-20 year product that requires proactive maintenance (such as seal coating and crack filling) over its life. With overlay, the longevity of asphalt pavements can be increased by more than 15 years, depending on the application.

DURABILITY: When paving with concrete on a standard aggregate base foundation, this material is typically placed on a surface that requires control joints to allow for flexibility and to minimize cracking. With asphalt, paving on a standard 4 inches thick, 4 inches for specified conditions. Asphalt allows more “give” than concrete and thus does not require heavy traffic stress and oxidation.

COST: Concrete can cost twice as much on average to install than asphalt (considering material prices, labor and underground utility work is required). Asphalt, while less costly to install, requires routine maintenance and may require more to achieve its maximum lifespan.

Application

The use of both concrete and asphalt within a typical parking lot showcases the distinct strengths each material brings. On a commercial site displays some of these uses. On this site, asphalt was chosen as the primary pavement surface to avoid unattractive markings left by vehicle tires and oil leaks, and because it contrasts pavement striping and markings better.

Concrete is utilized in heavy traffic load areas, such as loading ramps, dumpster pads and access drives, due to its durability on landscape islands. Another important use is in the application of curbs and valley gutters as rigid structures to move water.

All-in-One

One of the greatest advantages you can leverage is working with a contractor experienced in the application of both materials. This contractor can give you the most objective advice on how to manage the tradeoffs in cost versus durability between asphalt and concrete and can give you the most objective advice on how to manage the maintenance plans of your new or existing site. Working with a single contractor for asphalt and concrete eliminates the time and cost of managing multiple contractors.

So the next time you hear rival chatter between asphalt and concrete, remember this: It’s OK to root for your favorite material. There is a place for both on the playing field.