

New Year date for Euro bitumen standard



Adoption in the UK of the new European bitumen specification will initially concentrate the minds of designers and specifiers of asphalt carriageway but cause them no difficulties in the long term, industry sources predict. Some disquiet exists, however, in particular over the fact that traditional 70 and 100 pen grades have no direct equivalent in the new standard.

European harmonisation led to the publication last year of BS EN 12591. The UK roads industry delayed its introduction but the new specifications will be applicable from January 2002.

BS EN 12591 replaces the existing penetration grade bitumen specification (BS 3690), but the grades in the new document are different and in many cases not directly equivalent to those specifiers are familiar with.

Replacement grades for 70 and 100 pen grades are:

- for 70 pen – 50/70 pen (slightly harder) or 70/100 pen (slightly softer)
- for 100 pen – 70/100 pen (slightly harder) or 100/150 pen (slightly softer).

For most bituminous mixtures, a “preferred” grade

has already been identified, and the asphalt standard BS 4987 – published last May – simply replaces 100 pen with the softer 100/150 pen grade.

Asphalt specialist Dr Robert Hunter, senior partner of consultant Hunter & Edgar says that most in the industry will be well aware of impending changes. However, specifiers who have only an occasional need of asphalts need to be aware that some changes are significant. “Penetration of the bitumen in an asphalt is obviously an important determinant of its behaviour. A change of this magnitude will clearly affect the characteristics of the mixture.”

The changeover period could cause problems, according to some industry sources. Asphalt suppliers may be in the middle of ongoing contracts specified at a grade that no longer exists, and will have to negotiate with individual clients to find the right solution. Some companies may ask their bitumen suppliers to convert bitumen held in storage tanks to the new grades at the start of the New Year.

“This is not difficult to do although care will have to be displayed as far as quality and auditing is concerned,” says UK Technical Manager of Nynas Bitumen Chris Southwell.

Call for maintenance targets



The influential Construction Products Association (CPA) has called on Government to set interim targets to ensure the road maintenance requirements of the 10 Year Transport Plan are being met.

Funding has been allocated for both national and local road maintenance in the £180,000M plan launched last year. But the CPA wants the Government to set out in next year’s Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) how much work will be done by 2006.

In a report published in October, the CPA says: “The CSR 2002 should include an interim target for further reduction in the backlog of road maintenance by 2006, consistent with the ultimate target of eliminating all road maintenance backlog by 2010.”

Of most concern is the condition of local roads. Allen Willen, economics director at the CPA, said: “The Highways Agency does seem to be geared up to setting targets and meeting those. The big concern

has got to be the deterioration of local roads.”

Government’s target is to halve deterioration in the condition of local roads by 2004, and eliminate the repair backlog by 2010. Before funding can be targeted, however, local authorities need to know where the problems are.

The National Road Maintenance Condition Survey, currently under way, will eventually give local authorities an accurate figure for the scale of the backlog. The ALARM Survey of the Asphalt Industry Alliance published this spring puts the current backlog of maintenance at £1,300M.

The CPA says this – and regularly updated surveys – must form the basis of decisions on funding. “Funding allocations should be tied in with survey findings,” said Willen. “There is no point in just increasing funding by 20% if the condition of the roads is still getting worse.”

To view the report, go to the CPA website at www.constprod.org.uk