

RMC

Highway maintenance requires astute planning and good management to ensure high standards of safety, as RMC has been demonstrating lately.

Fast finish by surfacing's safe hands

Two major resurfacing projects recently carried out by RMC stand out as prime examples of how such contracts can be completed quickly and without compromising safety standards. Working beside live traffic carries inherent risks, but with thorough attention to management procedure, the contractor has responded rapidly to clients' needs while maintaining safety on site.

Both contracts, on the M11 and M3, involved partial reconstruction and resurfacing of busy stretches of motorway carriageway with various programmed phases of traffic management. Client in both cases was the Highways Agency (HA), which wanted the work completed as expeditiously as possible to minimise disruption.

In all likelihood, road users also wanted quick riddance of the traffic cones. But the HA and RMC were acutely aware of the importance of putting safety high on the agenda.

Accidents caused by motorists speeding through

"Effective management procedures have to be in place and an experienced team is needed to underpin safe methods of working on site." **Richard Butterfield.**

road works, resulting in death or injury for highway maintenance workers, have risen in recent years. The highway maintenance sector can do little to change motorists' behaviour, but its practitioners are not taking the issue of safety in light measure.

Safe working practice within the limited space commonly allowed by highway maintenance projects is a high priority for RMC. The contractor has developed its own methods of maintaining safety and is committed to a number of industry wide initiatives.

"Highway resurfacing projects are not simple, especially with regard to safety. By their nature, having restricted working room alongside live traffic with materials and plant being delivered to site, they present a fairly hazardous environment," says RMC Major Projects Manager Richard Butterfield.

"Effective management procedures have to be in place and an experienced team is needed to underpin safe methods of working on site. On the M11 contract, the safety of our workers was helped by Essex Police being involved in a Government backed scheme for increasing enforcement of safe speed limits. The Police placed 20 Tascar speed cameras throughout the works and were determined to prosecute drivers exceeding the 40 MPH signed limit."

RMC's work on the M11 was completed in March this year with a 100% safety record. It was also finished 30 days early, after the contractor threw considerable effort and resources behind getting the work done quickly.

The need to resurface the worn out concrete carriageway with an overlay of asphalt including a thin wearing course system – RMC's Viatex thin surfacing was used – had become acute. Also, through unfortunate timing, the project coincided with a major scheme 10 km north where work was



- 1: Surfacing work on the M11 was completed 30 days early with a 100% safety record.
- 2: Careful management of plant, materials and labour within restricted working room is key to maintaining safety.



- 3: The need for snake protection led to fast tracking of the M3 contract and additional diligence towards safety procedure.

under way to improve the Stansted junction. The HA wanted the resurfacing work finished as quickly as possible without compromising quality or safety and RMC rose to the challenge.

On the M3 contract this summer, again as main contractor, RMC has carried out a near repeat performance, this time putting in the extra effort to claw back time lost through unexpected delay.

“The M3 work started in June and was planned for an end of September completion, but we lost a number of weeks from the original programme due to the discovery of Smooth snakes within the verges,” Butterfield says. “Their habitat is protected by European legislation so after consulting experts on the subject, we fenced off a 2km length of verge to protect the snakes.”

The time lost to unforeseen snake protection was pulled back by working closely with the HA and Mott MacDonald, the managing agent, to reprogramme.

Work involved partial reconstruction of the eastbound carriageway, replacing safety fencing and improving central reserve drainage as well as resurfacing the westbound lanes with Viatex. The contract was completed before the end of September with another good safety record.

“Putting additional resources into the site and generally working that bit harder to get the work done on time will increase the safety hazards for everyone involved, if the team does not have its eye on the ball,” says Butterfield.

“The key to maintaining safety is in coordinating significant numbers of men and machines in a restricted working area.”

RMC uses a “Gateman” system of managing vehicle movements within its lane closures. All deliveries and plant entering the works are held in a neutral zone inside the site access before being directed safely to where the material or equipment is

needed, when the site team is ready for it.

This is in addition to other standard RMC safety procedures, such as full safety induction for all staff and operatives entering the site and use of correct high visibility personal protective equipment and banksmen with all plant.

Safety management by RMC has been boosted in recent years by the company’s adoption of a proactive approach to supporting industry wide initiatives and raising the profile of safety issues. The company has also appointed a dedicated surfacing safety advisor, Geof Shearn.

“Safety is a vital aspect of RMC’s operations, including active committal to the Healthy & Safety Executive’s Hard Target initiative for reducing accidents and injuries in the construction sector,” says Shearn.

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