

Analysis

Suppliers gearing up for new standards



Asphalt and bitumen suppliers are gearing up to ensure their readiness for introduction of the new European aggregate specifications on 1 January 2004. New production, sales and testing systems are being prepared and training and seminar programmes are under way as the asphalt industry gets ready for "EN day".

From 1 January, there will be eight new aggregate product standards and 36 new standards for test methods supported by nine national guidance documents. The new product standard of most relevance to the asphalt sector is BS EN 13043 Aggregates for Bituminous Mixtures & Surface Treatments. Guidance on use of this standard is given in the new PD 6682-2.

Crucially, the BS EN specifications introduce new aggregate terminology, product descriptions, sieve sizes, grading presentation and test methods. There are also revised requirements for Factory Product Control and 'CE Marking'.

"Introduction of European specifications represents the biggest change for the UK aggregate and asphalt industry since metrication of product sizes," says Aggregate Industries' Aggregate Research Manager Graeme Richards. "We are using a series of internal training courses to make sure everyone is ready for the switch and a conversion table is being produced for our employees and customers."

The Quarry Products Association and its members, including the founder sponsors of

Modern Asphalts, have been running a programme of informative events on the EN specifications. The QPA has also published useful information on the changes and their meaning on its website.

RMC Technical Services Manager John Lay says: "We have been involved with the QPA's programme, including presentations in Northern Ireland and Scotland. At RMC, having completed management briefings, we are now cascading information to all members of staff and talking to customers ready for the big day."

Suppliers have to be prepared for switching production, sales and delivery systems to the new specifications overnight as the existing British Standards will cease abruptly at midnight on 31 December.

"All management systems and the computer software that helps the company tick is being updated and prepared for the changes," says Hanson Head of Product Technology Charlie Jones. "It's a lot of work but the new standards and harmonisation with Europe will benefit designers and specifiers. We now have to ensure everyone concerned is familiar with the changes."

Bitumen suppliers are also preparing for EN day. Nynas Asphalt Engineering Manager Jukka Laitinen says: "The aggregates essentially will be the same. But the EN standards introduce new language which we have to learn to enable us to support our customers in conjunction with the new bitumen EN specs introduced last year."