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Cover Story

The New Texas Asphalt

How Texas built a better pavement system.

By Emily Adams

Features



Going Beyond the Specifications

TxDOT's guidance documents pave the way to project success.

By Emily Adams



Shining a Light on Safety

How TxDOT protects its crews after dark.

By Cathleen Draper



The Power of PFC

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By Cathleen Draper

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Clifton Kay
A.L. Helmcamp
2026 TXAPA President

“

I want to personally thank the members who served on that committee for their hard work and thoughtful input throughout the process.

Planning to Succeed

First, I want to thank everyone who has supported me during the first few months of 2026. The support from both our members and staff has been tremendous, and the time has certainly flown by.

In this edition of *Texas Asphalt*, I'd like to focus on one of the four pillars, or 4Ps, (Partnership, Planning, Participation, and Performance) that guide our 2026 priorities: Planning. Benjamin Franklin famously said, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." Let it be known that at TXAPA, we are planning to succeed!

Over the past 18 months, the TXAPA Board and Staff have worked diligently to prepare for the future and position the association to continue growing and protecting our market.

One major step forward was the acquisition of a building in the Fort Worth area that will support the continued growth of HMAC while also serving as a home office for a North Texas Regional Representative. The facility will provide a more central and convenient location for North and West Texas members, as well as TxDOT personnel, to gather for training and meetings. It also gives us the capability to host larger regional events and discussions.

Another exciting milestone was breaking ground on the new APEX building on the Buda campus. We are looking forward to this project and hope to have the APEX staff moved into the new facility by late 2026. In addition to supporting APEX

operations, the building will also provide much-needed space when overflow occurs during larger events and meetings on campus.

This year also brought the approval of a new dues structure following an extensive review process. I want to personally thank the members who served on that committee for their hard work and thoughtful input throughout the process. This updated structure will help support investments like the Fort Worth and APEX facilities while also giving TXAPA the ability to continue expanding our regional staff presence in support of our members across the state.

Finally, an important step in planning for the future of the association has been completed through the nationwide search for TXAPA's next Chief Operating Officer. This role became necessary as we prepare for our CEO, Harold Mullen, to retire. After a thorough search process, we were proud to select someone who already knows our association well—Corey Schwarz.

Congratulations to Corey and his family. We look forward to many years of his leadership and service to this great association.

Summer is upon us. Please stay safe and thank you for your continued support of TXAPA.

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Harold C. Mullen
CEO
TXAPA

Preparing TXAPA's Next Chapter

A leadership transition built on excellence

After serving TXAPA for 31 years, I have had the privilege of witnessing remarkable growth within our industry and our association. One of the most important responsibilities entrusted to any chief executive is to ensure that the organization is positioned for continued success long after his or her tenure concludes. For that reason, the selection of TXAPA's next generation of leadership became one of the most significant initiatives undertaken by our Board of Directors in recent years.

Recognizing the importance of this transition, the Board chose to conduct a comprehensive national search for a future Chief Operating Officer who would ultimately succeed me as Chief Executive Officer in 2027. Rather than limiting the search to familiar circles, the Board engaged a nationally recognized executive recruiting firm to identify and develop an outstanding pool of highly qualified candidates from across the country.

The Board appointed the TXAPA CEO Advisory Committee to oversee the search process. Chaired by Past President Eric Suarez, the committee was composed of TXAPA's five immediate past presidents. Collectively, these leaders brought decades of experience, industry knowledge, and an appreciation for the unique culture that has made TXAPA one of the most respected asphalt pavement associations in the nation.

The recruiting firm worked closely with the committee to develop a detailed leadership profile that reflected not only the operational demands of the position but also the strategic vision necessary to guide TXAPA into the future. The search attracted candidates with impressive backgrounds in association management, business leadership, public affairs, operations, strategic planning, and member services.

What followed was an extensive and highly structured interview process. Initial screening interviews evaluated leadership experience, communication skills, organizational accomplishments, and cultural compatibility. Candidates who advanced through the early stages participated in multiple rounds of interviews with members of the advisory committee.

The committee's discussions with candidates went far beyond reviewing résumés. Interviews explored how candidates would approach industry advocacy, workforce development, member engagement, technical advancement, financial stewardship, and strategic growth. Candidates were challenged to discuss real-world scenarios and explain how they would lead an organization as unique and involved as TXAPA.

As the process progressed, one candidate consistently distinguished himself. Corey Schwarz demonstrated exceptional leadership capabilities, a strong understanding of organizational management, and a genuine appreciation for the role associations play in advancing industries and serving members. Equally important, he exhibited the collaborative leadership style and strategic mindset necessary to guide TXAPA through future opportunities and challenges.

Following extensive evaluation and discussion, the advisory committee unanimously recommended Corey to the Board of Directors. The Board subsequently selected him to serve as Chief Operating Officer, establishing a deliberate succession plan that will culminate with his appointment as Chief Executive Officer in 2027.

One of the most valuable outcomes of this process was something none of us fully anticipated. Through conversations with candidates from around the nation, the committee gained a



Candidates were challenged to discuss real-world scenarios and explain how they would lead an organization as unique and involved as TXAPA.

deeper appreciation for TXAPA's reputation and culture. Repeatedly, candidates spoke about the association's leadership, innovation, member engagement, and industry impact.

The committee reported that the process was extremely helpful, not only in identifying an outstanding successor but also in reinforcing how unique TXAPA truly is. We were reminded that our association serves as a model for others across the country and continues to lead our asphalt paving industry in meaningful ways.

As I look toward the future, I am confident that TXAPA is well positioned for continued success. The thoughtful, disciplined, and professional approach taken by our Board and advisory committee ensured that leadership succession was handled with the same commitment to excellence that has defined TXAPA throughout its history. I could not be more optimistic about the future and the opportunities that lie ahead under Corey's leadership. 🇹🇽

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The Evolution of TXAPA's MAPS Conferences

TXAPA's Materials and Asphalt Pavement Solutions (MAPS) regional conferences continued their strong momentum in 2026, expanding the association's reach and strengthening relationships with local agencies, municipal leaders, engineers, and industry professionals across Texas. They have become one of the strongest examples of how collaboration, regional focus, and industry engagement can elevate the asphalt industry throughout the state.

What began as a single annual conference has successfully evolved into four regional events serving the North, South, East, and West regions of the state. To date, TXAPA has successfully completed three regional MAPS Conferences in Midland (West), Corpus Christi (South), and Houston (East) with a fourth event scheduled in Dallas-Fort Worth-Hurst (North).

The transition to regional conferences has allowed TXAPA to better connect with contractors, producers, suppliers, engineers, and most importantly, local agency transportation professionals in the areas where they live and work. By expanding into multiple regions, the MAPS Conferences have created greater accessibility, stronger attendance, and more meaningful local participation while still maintaining the high standards and industry focus that define TXAPA.

The first three MAPS Conferences had a combined total of almost 450 attendees, and we expect another 160 or more in Dallas-Fort Worth-Hurst in May. They included dozens of local agencies and many local members—our regular member producers and contractors, major associate members,

and our associate members, including numerous engineering firms and our equipment, materials, and technology providers.

Each region brings its own unique challenges, project demands, and market opportunities. Hosting conferences in four different markets has allowed educational focus and discussions to become more relevant to local infrastructure needs, specifications, paving and compaction, and inspection and testing. It has also strengthened relationships between local industry partners and local agency partners throughout the state.

The growth of the MAPS Conferences reflects the continued success of the Texas asphalt industry and the commitment of TXAPA leadership, committees, and members to invest in education, innovation, and collaboration. Expanding from one location to four regional conferences was not simply about growth in numbers—it was about creating a stronger connection to the people and markets that drive Texas infrastructure forward every day.

Today, the TXAPA MAPS Conferences continue to serve as a platform for networking, technical learning, leadership development, and industry advancement, helping ensure that Texas remains a national leader in asphalt pavement quality and performance.

A sincere thank you to the TXAPA membership for their generous support of the MAPS program through their sponsorship, attendance, and participation in the technical programs and panel discussions. MAPS would not be possible without you. 🇹🇽

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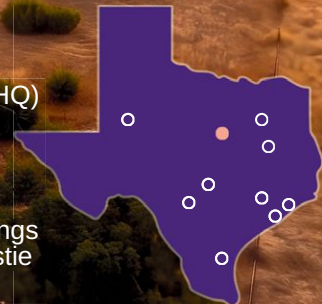
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Testing, Testing

Are we testing the right things?



Every test result is only as good as the sample that went into it.

If you've ever tried to check the temperature of a steak with a thermometer, you know there's a right way and a wrong way to do it. Stick the probe into the thickest part of the cut and you get a reliable reading. Hit a pocket of fat or get too close to the surface and suddenly that same thermometer is telling you a completely different story.

The thermometer didn't fail. The measurement did.

Asphalt binder testing works the same way. In Texas, asphalt binder is tested multiple times before it ever becomes part of a pavement. There are supplier quality control testing, verification testing, and quarterly sample and field sample testing by TxDOT, each serving an important role in ensuring materials meet TxDOT specifications. On paper, this layered approach provides confidence that the material being produced, shipped, and ultimately placed will perform as intended.

And in many cases, it does exactly that. But there is an important question worth asking: When results don't line up between tests, are we seeing a true difference in the material, or are we simply testing different samples?

Because at the end of the day, every test result is only as good as the sample that went into it.

Asphalt binder is not a perfectly uniform material sitting quietly in a tank. It is influenced by temperature gradients, storage conditions, blending practices, and movement within the system. Even in well-managed terminals, there can be subtle variations within a tank, a transport vessel, or a distributor. Those variations are usually small, but they become significant when the goal is to measure properties with precision.

Now consider what happens when samples are collected at different points in the process. A sample pulled from a terminal tank may not perfectly represent what is loaded into a truck. A sample taken from a distributor may not reflect what was originally produced. A field sample collected after transport and handling may have experienced temperature changes, contamination risks, or segregation effects. Each sample is valid in isolation, but they may not be identical representations of the same material.

That is where the challenge begins.

Multiple layers of testing provide redundancy and accountability. Supplier quality control testing ensures material leaving the terminal meets specification. Independent or agency testing provides verification. Field sampling offers a snapshot of what is actually delivered to the project. Each layer has value, and together they create a system of checks and balances.

The benefit is confidence. The downside is complexity.

When results differ, it is easy to assume something went wrong in production. Sometimes that is the case. But just as often, the difference can be traced back to how, where, and when the sample was collected. In those situations, we are not necessarily comparing the same material. We are comparing different representations of it.

That distinction matters. From a supplier's perspective, consistency is not just about producing material that

meets a specification; it is about ensuring that the material behaves consistently across the entire supply chain, from tank to truck to roadway. That requires good production practices, but also good sampling practices.

Representative sampling is one of the most important and most overlooked parts of asphalt binder testing.

A properly collected sample should reflect the true condition of the material at that point in time. That means accounting for storage conditions, avoiding contamination, and collecting from a location that represents the bulk material rather than a localized condition. It also means recognizing that timing matters. A sample taken before adequate circulation or mixing may not tell the same story as one taken after.

Without representative samples, even the most precise laboratory test becomes less meaningful. This is not an argument against multiple layers of testing. In a system as large and complex as Texas, redundancy is necessary. The scale of production, the distances involved, and the demands placed on pavements require a high level of confidence in material quality. Multiple test points help provide that confidence.

But as an industry, it is worth remembering that more testing does not automatically mean better information. Better sampling does.

The strength of Texas asphalt pavements is built not only on good specifications and advanced testing methods, but also on the fundamentals. Understanding the material. Managing variability. And ensuring that when we test something, we are actually testing what we think we are testing.

Because whether it is a steak on a grill or asphalt binder in a tank, the result is only as reliable as where you put the probe. ➡

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Strengthening Local Agency Connections

One more way TXAPA is working for you

Over the past year, TXAPA has expanded its focus on local agencies through a growing network of regional programs, association partnerships, and educational resources designed specifically for cities and counties.

For Director of Special Projects Larry Peirce, that work builds on one of the key priorities identified by TXAPA leadership: strengthening relationships with local agencies and with the major associations that serve them. With decades of experience and an active statewide network, Peirce has helped TXAPA increase its presence at conferences including TACERA, TML, APWA Texas, ASCE Texas CECON, and NACE, where TXAPA recently participated as part of a major asphalt industry presence.

A major part of that outreach is the continued growth of MAPS—Materials and Asphalt Pavement Solutions. Rather than relying on one central meeting, TXAPA has taken MAPS into regions across the state, including Midland, Corpus Christi, and Houston. The regional format has helped TXAPA reach local agency professionals who may not otherwise attend a statewide program.

“We’ve really increased our access to local agencies by taking it to them,” Peirce said.

Local champions have been essential to that effort. Leaders such as Gabe McClelland with the City of Midland, Ernie De La Garza with the City of Corpus Christi, and Casey McKay with Houston METRO have helped strengthen regional participation, support outreach, and bring local agency perspectives into the program.

Associate members also continue to play an important role in MAPS by exhibiting, sharing knowledge, and connecting directly with local agencies. Through the Associate Member Advisory Commit-



tee, TXAPA is also exploring additional ways to enhance the associate member experience and provide meaningful opportunities for involvement.

Beyond conferences, TXAPA’s local agency outreach now includes the RoadMAPS podcast, local agency blog content, lunch-and-learns, and a dedicated Local Agency Hub on the TXAPA website. These resources are designed around the specific challenges cities and counties face, from specifications and inspection education to pavement solutions tailored to individual agency needs.

TXAPA also remains fully engaged in Partners in Quality meetings with TxDOT. With additional staff support, the association is better positioned to serve these meetings while also developing focused working groups around district-specific needs.

For Peirce, the first year has been about growth, connection, and building on the strong foundation already in place.

“I’m really glad to be part of it,” he said. “I’m excited about the growth within TXAPA and all of the great programs we have going on.”

**Check out
the Local
Agency Hub
here:**



Texas State Lassoos First Place

TXST wowed the Asphalt Road-eo Competition judges

Every April, TXAPA's Buda campus transforms into a proving ground for innovation, teamwork, and a little friendly competition during the annual Asphalt Road-eo. In 2026, Texas State University finally captured the first-place finish they had been chasing since the competition began—over the years, they finished in second- and third-place.

The winning Texas State Road Warriors—Anthony Breaux, Ashley Herman, Ty Brown, and Jeongbin Park—impressed judges with a mix design that incorporated carbon fiber reinforcement, recycled carpet fibers, and improved temperature control during production.

"This is my second year doing this, I've learned so much, I've really enjoyed the process, and I've had some great teammates, so it's made it a lot of fun," said Ashley Herman following the win.



The Texas State Road Warriors show off their winning slab after the "cracking test." From left to right, Jeongbin Park, Ty Brown, Ashley Herman, and Anthony Breaux.

The Asphalt Road-eo continues to give students a hands-on introduction to the asphalt industry while encouraging creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration—all qualities that were clearly on display from this year's championship team. Read more online!



See You in September

Register for TXAPA's 51st Annual Meeting

Registration is now open for the 51st Annual Meeting of the Texas Asphalt Pavement Association. TXAPA members, TxDOT personnel, and industry partners from across the state will convene at the beautiful Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort & Villas for technical sessions and networking events built around four pillars: partnership, planning, participation, and (asphalt pavement) performance.

This is a must-attend event for Texas asphalt pavement industry professionals, agencies, and industry partners.

One of the highlights of the annual meeting will be TXAPA Scholarship Night featuring legendary country music group Shenandoah. The evening supports the TXAPA Scholarship Program, which surpassed \$1 million in total funds raised

last year through the generosity and participation of the Texas asphalt pavement industry. Scholarship Night will include live and silent auctions benefiting the next generation of industry professionals before Shenandoah takes the stage to put an unforgettable finish on the evening. 🤠



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- ✦ Over the years, asphalt binders and aggregates evolved into highly engineered components.
- ✦ TXAPA and organizations like the Hot Mix Asphalt Center build a culture of knowledge sharing.

The New Texas Asphalt

How Texas built a better pavement system

By Emily Adams

Texas roads still begin with the same basic ingredients: rock and asphalt binder. But over the last several decades, nearly everything surrounding those materials has evolved.

Modern Texas asphalt is the product of decades of collaboration between contractors, suppliers, researchers, educators, and TxDOT engineers who continuously worked to solve problems, refine specifications, improve testing, and build a system focused on providing an economical, long-lasting pavement.

To better understand that evolution, TXAPA spoke with several individuals who helped shape it firsthand: Dr. Jon Epps, Ph.D., P.E., an asphalt pavement specialist and one of the original architects of the Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP) research effort; Dale Rand, P.E., executive director of the Lime Association and former head of TxDOT's Flexible Pavements Branch; Darren Hazlett, P.E., senior engineering scientist at the University of Texas Center for Transportation Research and former TxDOT construction division deputy director; industry veteran Harry Bush, P.E., director, technical services for Vulcan Materials Company; and Robert Lee, P.E., innovation advocacy manager at CRH Americas and former head of TxDOT's Flexible Pavements Branch.

Together, their perspectives tell the story of how Texas moved from a largely

prescriptive pavement system into one built around performance, quality assurance testing, education, and continuous collaboration. And while much of the public simply sees "roads," the people behind Texas asphalt see an interconnected system involving materials, design, construction, certification, research, and training—all working together to create longer-lasting pavements.

This first installment of "The New Texas Asphalt" focuses on the evolution of materials: liquid asphalt binders, aggregates, recycled materials, testing, and quality assurance. Future installments will examine how Texas transformed asphalt mix design and how education and workforce development continue driving the next generation of pavement innovation.

When Pavements Started Failing

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, asphalt pavements across Texas and the nation were struggling. Truck traffic was increasing, tire technology was changing, and steel-belted radial tires were concentrating heavier loads onto smaller pavement contact areas. The result was widespread rutting and moisture-related premature distress that forced engineers and contractors to rethink how pavements were designed, tested, and constructed.

"At that time, if you went to a conference anywhere in the country, people

were talking about rutting," recalled Dale Rand. "It was one of the biggest problems we were dealing with."

The concerns became significant enough that highway agencies nationwide pushed for a coordinated research effort that ultimately became the Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP), a massive asphalt binder and mixture research initiative launched in the late 1980s. Dr. Jon Epps was among the individuals involved in developing the original SHRP asphalt research framework, which helped reshape how the industry thought about pavement performance.

One of the major outcomes of SHRP was the development of the Superpave system—short for Superior Performing Asphalt Pavements. The system introduced new approaches to asphalt binder grading, mixture design, and pavement performance testing that focused less on rigid recipes and more on how asphalt performed under real-world traffic and environmental conditions.

Texas quickly became one of the leading states implementing those concepts while continuing to refine its own specifications, testing procedures, and construction practices.

While materials became a major focus, pavement performance depends on more than asphalt binder or aggregates alone. Rand often describes the ideal asphalt pavement as a "three-legged stool" comprised of good design, quality materials, and sound construction.



If you don't design it well, for example, then it's never going to be good, no matter how good the materials are or how good the construction is."

"If you don't design it well, for example, then it's never going to be good, no matter how good the materials are or how good the construction is," he explained.

That systems mindset became increasingly important as engineers recognized that pavement performance depended on every part of the process working together—from geotechnical design and drainage to material selection, mixture design testing, construction practices, and quality control.

The Asphalt Binder Revolution

As pavement demands increased across Texas, the asphalt industry began moving beyond traditional unmodified asphalt binders toward more engineered, performance-based asphalt binders.

For decades, asphalt binder was often treated as a relatively simple material, the glue holding aggregate together. But according to Darren Hazlett, modern pavement performance increasingly depended on understanding that the asphalt binder itself could dramatically influence how a pavement performed under traffic, heat, moisture, and aging. Hazlett explained. "If the binder is too soft, the pavement can rut. If it's too hard, it can crack."

That balancing act became especially important in Texas, where pavement surfaces can become dramatically hotter than ambient air temperatures during summer months while oxidation and

aging gradually stiffen pavements over time. Asphalt binder design increasingly became an exercise in balancing competing premature distress: too soft and the pavement could rut or shove under traffic; too hard and it could become brittle and crack as it aged.

Striking that balance became one of the driving forces behind the Performance Grade (PG) asphalt binder system developed through SHRP. Instead of focusing primarily on basic physical properties, the PG system evaluated how binders would perform under specific traffic and climate conditions. The PG system accelerated the use of polymer-modified binders throughout Texas.

"It gives the binder that rubbery property we're looking for," Hazlett explained of polymer modification. "It increases stiffness at high road temperatures to help prevent rutting."

At the same time, engineers increasingly realized that aggregate structure alone could not solve every pavement problem. "We learned that the asphalt binder has a lot to do with rutting and stripping, not just the aggregate skeleton," Rand explained.

The evolution of liquid asphalt also transformed how quality control worked throughout the industry. Decades ago, TxDOT inspectors were stationed directly at asphalt terminals and refineries, monitoring production and approving shipments.

But as binder systems became more sophisticated and performance-oriented, the industry gradually shifted toward supplier-based quality control systems paired with TxDOT oversight and verification quality assurance testing—a transition that placed far greater responsibility on suppliers to maintain laboratory testing, documentation, consistency, and internal quality control systems.

"There is a lot more responsibility placed on the supplier now than there was 40 years ago," Hazlett said.

That transition reflected a broader philosophical shift occurring with asphalt pavements: moving away from highly prescriptive recipe-based specifications toward systems focused on measurable pavement performance. Rather than simply prescribing ingredients, engineers increasingly focused on how mixtures behaved under traffic, moisture, temperature, and time.

Today, many of those same philosophies continue evolving through Balanced Mix Design (BMD), an approach that focuses less on prescribing exact ingredients and more on evaluating how asphalt mixtures perform through laboratory testing. Rather than relying solely on traditional volumetric properties, BMD attempts to balance competing pavement distresses such as rutting and cracking—a concept that closely mirrors the balancing act Hazlett described for asphalt binders.

Meanwhile, asphalt binder research continues to evolve. Hazlett noted that researchers increasingly focus on slowing oxidation and long-term aging, so pavements remain flexible longer into their service lives.

"If I can add something to the binder so it doesn't age as much, then I can postpone the day when it becomes too stiff and starts cracking," he explained.

The Aggregate Revolution

During this time, the aggregate industry was also undergoing a transformation. According to Harry Bush, the trajectory went from simply supplying rock into engineering highly specialized structural systems designed for specific pavement applications.

"It's still rock coming out of the ground," Bush explained. "But we are doing things differently."

Earlier generations of asphalt mixtures often relied heavily on finer gradations that lacked strong internal aggregate structure. "A lot of the older mixes were sand-on-binder," Bush said. "You had

aggregate, then a lot of sand and binder filling in the gaps.”

As Superpave concepts emerged through the SHRP era, Texas increasingly moved toward mixtures emphasizing stone-on-stone contact, where larger aggregate particles interlock and carry traffic loads more effectively.

“That stone-on-stone contact gives strength, so it doesn’t rut,” Bush explained. “And the asphalt binder film thickness is increased around the aggregate giving it durability and flexibility, so it doesn’t crack.”

Implementation of the Hamburg Wheel Tracking (HWT) test in the late 1990s proved to be a game changer in predicting long-term HMA field performance. In the laboratory, the HWT identifies HMA mixes prone to premature rutting or stripping, helping prevent poor-performing mixes from being placed on Texas roadways.

Through the HWT, the industry learned that aggregate performance varied dramatically depending on source and application. River gravels, for example, offered excellent hardness and skid resistance but historically raised stripping concerns because asphalt binder struggled to adhere to their smooth surfaces.

“The asphalt binder on some gravels is almost like asphalt stuck to glass,” Bush explained. “You could almost get your fingernail under it and peel it off.” The HWT demonstrated that lime and other additives could be used to greatly reduce stripping concerns.

Beyond validating the benefits of lime in HMA, the HWT also drove major advances in anti-strip additives, moisture susceptibility testing, and binder chemistry. At the same time, Texas placed increasing emphasis on long-term skid resistance through expanded use of SAC A aggregates—harder, polish-resistant materials capable of maintaining micro-texture surface texture under traffic.

“The whole theory is that the SAC A doesn’t polish down as much,” Bush explained. “You end up with better micro-texture from the aggregate and macro-texture from the mix that gives you improved skid resistance.”

Aggregate quality control evolved dramatically as modern testing methods such as the Micro-Deval allowed producers to evaluate durability far faster and more accurately than older testing procedures. “It’s a quick way to determine whether your material is going to meet quality standards,” Bush said.

Meanwhile, quarry operations themselves became increasingly sophisticated. Modern aggregate operations now rely heavily on geology teams, coring programs, digital mapping, and three-dimensional modeling to understand material quality before blasting even begins.

“We used to just blast a shot and see what we got,” Bush said. “Now we know what it’s going to be before we mine it.”

That same philosophy of material stewardship eventually extended into recycled materials as reclaimed asphalt pavement (RAP) usage increased throughout Texas. Contractors and agencies began recognizing that recycled pavements contained valuable aggregate and binder resources that could be carefully managed and reused rather than treated as waste.

According to Robert Lee, the industry’s thinking fundamentally changed when RAP stopped being viewed as a disposable byproduct and started being treated as an engineered material stream. “We stopped treating it like a waste product and started treating it like an asset,” Lee explained.

That shift led to major improvements in stockpile management, fractionation, contamination control, and preservation

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of premium aggregate materials. Instead of indiscriminately blending reclaimed materials together, producers increasingly separated materials by source and performance characteristics so high-quality aggregate resources could retain their value.

"If we know what's in it and we know the properties of it, then we're okay using more of it," Lee said.

In many ways, RAP management became the natural extension of the broader evolution occurring throughout the Texas asphalt industry: greater intentionality, better testing, improved data, and more sophisticated stewardship of materials.

The Role of TXAPA and the Hot Mix Asphalt Center

While technical advances reshaped materials and specifications, another equally important transformation was occurring. Over the last several decades, Texas built an intentionally collaborative relationship between the industry and TxDOT—one that many participants believe became one of the defining strengths of the state's asphalt pavement program.

According to Dr. Epps, that collaboration matured through multiple interconnected systems: the TXAPA Annual Meeting, steering committees, working groups, certification programs, and ongoing educational initiatives.

The creation of the Hot Mix Asphalt Center (HMAC) became one of the most



We used to just blast a shot and see what we got. Now we know what it's going to be before we mine it."

important milestones in that evolution. As QC/QA specifications shifted greater responsibility onto contractors and suppliers during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the industry needed standardized technician training and certification systems capable of supporting the increasingly sophisticated testing and quality control environment.

The result was the development and delivery of certification programs covering asphalt binders, aggregates, soils, bases, and asphalt mixture testing in hot mix asphalt.

"It's a big deal," Epps said of the certification program. "The certification program and the specification changes have and continue to influence the quality of hot mix."

The system helped create a shared technical language between contractors, suppliers, consultants, and TxDOT personnel across the state. Over time,

recurring steering committees and working groups brought industry partners and TxDOT together quarterly to address emerging pavement issues collaboratively rather than relying on isolated specification changes or one-time research projects.

"It's not a one-and-done thing," Epps explained. "It's a continuous process."

Paving the Way Forward

Today's asphalt pavements in Texas are the result of decades of refinement across every part of the system—design, materials, testing, construction, certification, research, and education.

Specifications continue evolving. Asphalt binder technologies continue advancing. Aggregate systems continue improving. Recycling practices are becoming more sophisticated. And educational programs continue training the next generation of technicians, engineers, and pavement professionals.

But perhaps the most important evolution was not technical at all.

Texas built a culture where knowledge continuously circulates between researchers, contractors, suppliers, educators, and agencies—a system where problems are studied collectively, lessons are shared openly, and improvements are constantly refined through collaboration.

That culture will be the reason Texas asphalt continues evolving. 📍

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Going Beyond the Specifications

TxDOT's guidance documents pave the way to project success

By Emily Adams

So, your company was awarded a TxDOT project, and the contract lands on your desk. Did you know that by signing that contract, you assume legal responsibility for having read and understood several other related documents?

There are Plans and General Notes, Specifications, and Test Methods. These comprise hundreds of pages of details for constructing the project to TxDOT's quality standards.

Enter the guidance document, which is typically only a few pages of expertly distilled information, like a "cheat code." Guidance documents provide invaluable additional information on processes, test methods, or materials listed in specifications.



ACCELERATE

- ✦ TxDOT's guidance documents serve as a "cheat code" for companies awarded TxDOT projects.
- ✦ They clarify processes, offer tips beyond the test method, and address quality issues.
- ✦ TxDOT's Materials and Test Division develops guidance documents and revises and updates them.
- ✦ Using guidance documents in project prep demonstrates compliance and builds trust.



From left to right, Ben Arras, Sarah De La O, Gisel Carrasco, Sydnie Thibodeaux, and Zahra Sotoodeh-Nia of the TxDOT Materials and Test Division.

Utilizing them isn't mandatory, and there isn't one for every specification, but when they are available, guidance documents are an essential part of a project moving forward successfully.

Whether you are a contractor or producer, work for TxDOT, or are a city or county utilizing TxDOT specifications, understanding what these documents are—and where to find them—will benefit you and help ensure a high-quality, long-lasting roadway.

Are Guidance Documents a Best-Kept Secret?

You could think of guidance documents as a secret weapon, but TxDOT's Materials and Test Division (MTD) would prefer everyone to know what they are, where to find them, and where to locate further guidance information when needed.

Transportation Engineer Sarah De La O, P.E., and Flexible Pavements Section Director Gisel Carrasco, P.E., both with

MTD, are deeply involved in creating Flexible Pavement Guidance Documents. Along with Lacy Peters, P.E., pavement and materials engineer for the TxDOT Atlanta District, they recently introduced the three newest Flexible Pavements Guidance Documents at TxDOT's 2026 Construction, Materials, and Alternative Delivery Conference.

The documents, which are now available online, include the Overlay Test Guide, Reclaimed Asphalt Pavement (RAP) Stockpile Management Best Practices, and Hot Mix Asphalt Exempt Production. Introducing the documents at the conference was an opportunity not only to showcase their latest work, but to shine a spotlight on a resource that can actively improve project outcomes to a broader audience.

What is the Purpose of a Guidance Document?

Guidance documents can serve many purposes. In the case of the new Overlay Test Guide, the primary purpose is to provide additional information—tips for running the test not listed in Tex-248-F.

The primary purpose of Reclaimed Asphalt Pavement (RAP) Stockpile Management Best Practices is to address a quality issue: reducing variability in RAP stockpiles.

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The Hot Mix Asphalt (HMA) Exempt Production Guidance was developed to clarify exempt production, which is commonly misunderstood. These are just three instances when a guidance document may be deemed beneficial.

The “Why” Behind Creating a Guidance Document

There are a few reasons why MTD may decide to create a Flexible Pavements Guidance Document. The most common is in response to industry requests.

MTD relies on information from the field to determine where contractors need clarification. Feedback from technicians is another driver.

Explained De La O, “Sometimes there is not one right way to do something, but there are better ways than others.”

As the test methods are performed and processes are perfected, it presents an opportunity to do something more accurately. She emphasized that guidance documents allow TxDOT to pass valuable information to contractors faster.

“Can you imagine if TxDOT waited to update the specs every time a new piece of information came to light about a test method?” she asked.

One other common reason MTD creates guidance documents is when there are issues in the way the spec is being followed or not followed.

The creation process begins with a draft of the document, which is reviewed by a team internally—formed by MTD and district subject matter experts—before it is presented to the industry via TXAPA and AGC for comments. The comments are incorporated and the process repeats until the document is finalized.

When test methods and specifications are changed, it follows that guidance documents must change as well. MTD is working on revising several previously available

guidance documents which are no longer in circulation due to the 2024 Spec Book rewrite.

Guidance Documents as Part of Your Project Prep

Unlike Plans and General Notes, Specifications, and Test Methods, guidance documents are not contractually required reading, but TXAPA’s Chuck

Fuller, a former contractor who “lived by the guidance documents,” believes they should be.

Carrasco suggests contractors include them in their project preparation and for operations guidance in general—especially because following the guidance in the documents can set the stage for how TxDOT lets a project.

“If we know our contractors are properly managing RAP stockpiles for example, we know we can allow more RAP in the projects successfully,” said Carrasco.

Where Can You Find More Assistance?

It is important to know that these documents are centralized on the TxDOT MTD website, and the team is available to answer questions and provide clarification when needed.

In many ways, the Flexible Pavements team serves as a “human guidance document,” helping contractors navigate specifications, test methods, and evolving best practices in the field. MTD emphasizes that communication with the industry is not only welcomed, but encouraged, and ideas for future guidance documents are always appreciated. 📍

New Documents In Progress

- » Thermal Imaging System Guidance
- » Ignition Oven Correction Factors

Revisions to Documents in Progress

- » Protocol for Roadway Core Custody
- » Material Selection Guide

Scan the QR code to view TxDOT’s materials guidance documents.



Questions, feedback, and suggestions can be directed to:
mtd-flexpave-engineering@txdot.gov



ACCELERATE

- ✦ Extreme heat and heavy traffic make daytime paving dangerous for crews.
- ✦ Nighttime paving reduces heat stress but introduces visibility and fatigue risks.
- ✦ Class 3 equipment, effective lighting, and traffic control devices help motorists see crews.
- ✦ Pre-shift planning and team communication are central to TxDOT's safety culture.



Shining a Light on Safety

How TxDOT protects its crews after dark

By Cathleen Draper

Peak paving season is officially underway, and as crews take to Texas' roadways, the harsh light of day poses a myriad of safety risks to workers.

To start, extreme heat, something Texans are all too familiar with.

In 2023—one of the hottest summers on record in the state—the average daily temperature hovered around 85° F, with the average high across the state sitting at 98°. In the hot Texas sun, asphalt pavement can reach temperatures upwards of 150° F. And due to asphalt's composition, it retains heat far longer than other materials.

The risks blistering heat exposes daytime crews to include heatstroke, heat exhaustion, dehydration, and increased occurrences of occupational injuries.

But high temps aren't the only concern of daytime paving crews. More motorists hit the road during the day, which means more chances for accidents. High traffic volume poses a serious safety risk to crews—in 2025 there were 28,000 crashes in Texas

work zones according to TxDOT, resulting in the death of seven roadside workers.

Not to mention, when daytime paving projects require lane closures or traffic switches, bottlenecks build, increasing the risk of accidents and driving commute times up for the public.

That's why some operations have moved under the cover of darkness, explained Robert Godina, safety operations section director in the occupational safety division of TxDOT.

Nighttime work "alleviates some of the concern," around heat stress and worker fatigue, Godina said. "It leads to fewer of those occupational injuries."

Traffic numbers are far lower at night, too, allowing crews to close lanes or exits without concerns of congestion.

However, nighttime paving carries its own concerns.

Reduced visibility is one of the top woes, and that can lead to work zone accidents, especially as motorists at night might be fatigued, distracted, or driving impaired. Lower visibility can also increase the likelihood of equipment backing collisions or crew members becoming caught in between equipment.

"It might be more difficult to judge distances," Godina said. "If you consider a paver and a rolling operation during the daytime, obviously the lighting is different. In the nighttime, the likelihood of misjudging those distances in between equipment could be elevated."

And at night, crews are working against their own natural circadian rhythms, leading to slower reaction times and impaired decision-making.

“

Our folks on the ground are always looking out for one another to ensure that we're following through with those processes.”

Know Your PPE:

Understanding Class 3 High-Visibility Gear

Not all safety vests are created equal. The ANSI/ISEA107 standard establishes three classes of high-visibility personal protective equipment, and for workers in high-risk environments like nighttime road construction, only Class 3 will do.

What sets Class 3 apart? Class 3 PPE offers the highest level of visibility of the three classes, covering the torso, arms, and legs to make a worker identifiable at every angle and from a significant distance. It is specifically designed for environments where workers are exposed to fast-moving traffic or low-light and nighttime conditions.

How does it work? The garments are made with retroreflective material, which bounces light directly back to its source—meaning a driver's headlights illuminate a worker clearly rather than scattering light in other directions.

When should it be replaced? High-visibility gear degrades over time with washing, wear, and UV exposure. Once a garment shows visible signs of wear or no longer meets the reflectivity requirements of the ANSI/ISEA standard, it should be replaced.

The bottom line: In a dark work zone with vehicles traveling at highway speeds, Class 3 PPE is more than a regulation—it can be the difference between life and death.

"We allow our employees to get acclimated as much as possible before changing that shift—for instance, from a daytime shift to a nighttime shift—and then going back to normal ops as well," Godina said. "It does take its toll on our bodies and our minds."

Light Up the Night

TxDOT implements a series of measures to protect crews on the night shift. "We really emphasize being seen," Godina said.

It starts with what they wear. Nighttime paving crews are required to don Class 3 personal protective equipment under the ANSI/ISEA 107 standard. Class 3 PPE provides the highest level of visibility, highlighting workers at every angle and from a distance.

It's designed for high-risk environments, such as areas with fast-moving traffic or low-light conditions. The retroreflective material of these garments reflects light straight back to the source. When those items begin to show signs of wear, or they no longer work as prescribed per the ANSI/ISEA standard, they're efficiently replaced.

TxDOT also provides its employees with halo lights, which encircle their hard hats. And on the note of lighting, poorly designed lighting can create contrast hazards rather than improving visibility.

"We use the best possible technology that we have available for our internal forces if we're considering nighttime ops," Godina said.

TxDOT's Lights on for Safety program encourages workers to use every possible light on their equipment to increase visibility, both during the day and at night. This includes high-intensity lighting atop vehicles.

"Every opportunity that we can get to proactively increase our ability to be seen is what we're going to use," Godina said.

For traffic safety, TxDOT relies heavily on the Texas Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Part Six: Temporary Traffic Control, which calls for retroreflective signs, devices, and channelization to improve visibility.

To offset work zones at night, TxDOT uses a standard 42-inch two-piece cone, but that depends on the traffic control plan for a job and what TxDOT's engineers design for crews to use.

"We're always looking for ways to delineate traffic between the motorist and our workers behind those devices," Godina said. "Sometimes we even use a mobile barrier in our metro districts."

Concrete barriers are used, too, but that hinges on the instructions of the traffic safety and construction divisions.

A Culture of Safety

Nighttime paving safety typically starts before crews put on their high-visibility apparel for the night. It all begins with proper planning.

"Over the last several years, we've shifted our focus from what some would consider lagging indicators to leading indicators and with that comes proper planning, and being proactive with our work," Godina said.

At the start of each shift, paving crews have "play-of-the-day meetings," where leaders go into detail about traffic control plans—requirements for signs, delineation, cone use, the implementation of truck mounted attenuators, and more.

They also discuss hazards and how to mitigate them throughout the shift, plus the location of schools, hospitals, and other nearby facilities that might bring drivers into the work zone. Using Google Earth and other mapping tools, crews can determine where ingress and egress paths will be.

“Those play-of-the-day meetings have proven to be most effective for our crews working out on the roadway,” Godina said.

Workers are also encouraged to take stretch-and-flex breaks at the start of and throughout their shifts—whenever they feel fatigued, they take a micro-break to hydrate, stretch, and take a step away from the operation to refresh.

Throughout a night shift, supervisors and lead workers look to ensure crews remain on task without risk and intentionally rotate operators.

To instill a culture of safety during nighttime paving shifts, Godina and other safety folks work to provide trainings and the best, most up-to-date PPE. They look out for one another, as well.

“Our folks on the ground are always looking out for one another to ensure that

we’re following through with those processes as opposed to a heavy-handed enforcement mentality,” Godina said.

“Whenever we have teams that are working hand in hand and watching out for one another, coaching one another up, reminding each other about those items that will keep them safe, we tend to be a lot more focused on the work being done where it needs to be, all the while doing it safely.”

Communication is Key

The biggest shift Godina has seen in keeping nighttime paving crews safe has been from taking a reactive approach to a proactive one.

“That’s not only TxDOT internal forces, but we also encourage our construction inspectors who work alongside contractors to get into those pre-construction safety planning meetings,” he explained.

That line of communication bridges the gap to keep everyone safe.

Once a nighttime project begins, inspectors are encouraged to be active in tailgate meetings, those huddles on the side of the road as dusk settles. Godina and his team push them to participate and listen for items that can be adjusted before the shift to maximize worker safety.

Nighttime paving is a solid and sound solution to help crews perform work, Godina opined. “It also creates other concerns as well.

“By working with engineers within our operations and contractors and having those communication lines open, it helps us improve our decisions on how to better equip our employees—whether it be technology, whether it be PPE, and so forth. That ongoing relationship between the two is beneficial.” 🇹🇽



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The Power of PFC

Permeable friction course improves safety by putting water build-up at bay

By Cathleen Draper

In the 1970s, Texas began to implement what it called “plant mix seal”—a thin, porous surface treatment crafted in a hot mix plant—on its roadways to increase friction and prevent hydroplaning.

Many of these plant mix seals performed well, but some lasted only a few years before raveling began. Once they began to ravel, the surface rapidly degraded, resulting in pavement failure long before it was expected. The costs of replacing the plant mix seal often outweighed the benefits to the state’s roadways and drivers, and Texas backed off its use. By the late 1980s, few states continued to use plant mix seals as a surface treatment.

The state of Georgia, however, carried on. Between the late 80s and the 1996

Olympics, held in Atlanta, the state made significant improvements to plant mix seal, adding cellulose fibers and polymers to prevent the mix from raveling. Many states began to take notice of the quality improvements.

Dale Rand, then a TxDOT employee in the materials and test division, now executive director of the Lime Association of Texas, got the chance to travel to Georgia and analyze this new-and-improved asphalt that Georgia called “open-graded friction course.” The mix went by several different names, including “popcorn mix” because of its high air void structure. When Texas began to use it again in the late ’90s, it coined the name permeable friction course (PFC)—and it stuck.

PFC is exactly what the name suggests: a permeable form of asphalt, designed specifically to allow water into the pavement, where it then drains off underneath the topmost layer.

It’s implemented for a myriad of reasons on Texas roadways, but most importantly, as a safety measure to reduce wet-weather accidents.

“On conventional asphalt pavements, if water stands on the roadway surface, hydroplaning can occur, causing the vehicle to essentially float on the water,” Rand said. “This condition results in zero traction and significantly increases the odds of wet-weather accidents.”

Rand worked for TxDOT from 1987 until 2013. He’s seen PFC utilized on many projects, but the most successful in his opinion is its use on two- or four-lane undivided highways. Most wet-weather accidents occur on horizontal or vertical curves and intersections, he explained. Texas has numerous undivided farm-to-market (FM) or ranch-to-market (RM) roads, where opposing traffic negates curves at relatively high speeds. On rainy days with low visibility and high risk of hydroplaning, it’s a recipe for disaster.

“I always give the example, if you are driving 50 miles an hour in one direction, and somebody else is driving 50 miles an hour in the opposite direction, and they come into your lane causing a head-on collision, neither of you are likely going to survive,” Rand said. “That’s equivalent of a vehicle going 100 miles per hour hitting a solid a wall.”

With PFC use on these types of roads, wet-weather accidents are less likely to occur.

“

When Texas began to use it again in the late '90s, it coined the name permeable friction course (PFC)—and it stuck.

“

PFC does not need to be used everywhere. But it's the only mix type that does what it does in terms of safety.”

What Is Permeable Friction Course?

Almost all asphalt pavements are designed to prevent water from permeating the pavement and reaching the base and subgrade below.

“With typical hot mix, you want it to be compacted and have about 4 percent air voids, which is not enough to let water into the pavement. It sheds the water off,” Rand said.

Unlike other asphalt paving mixes, PFC typically has between 18 and 22 percent air voids, allowing water to seep through to the underlying layer, where it then drains off to the side.

Usually, PFC is comprised of a single size aggregate, “maybe a half inch to three-eighths of an inch,” Rand said—roughly the same size as a marble.

“The open structure of PFC is what allows the water to drain through it,” he continued. “For traditional dense-graded asphalt mixes, you normally utilize various aggregate sizes. You take a coarser rock and then mix it with intermediate and finer rock, including some sand, and you compact it tightly together.”

Though PFC today is an evolution of the plant mix seal of the '70s and '80s, it's still used as a surface layer on roadways. It's generally implemented on interstate highways and high-volume FM and RM roads.

“PFC works best on high-speed roadways where traffic is constantly moving and more channelized, but it is not ideal when there is a lot of stopping and turning action and traffic motions that you typically have in an urban area,” Rand said. Hard stops and turning vehicles can cause the treatment to ravel more quickly.

Where PFC is Placed

PFC performance is classified into three categories: functionality, durability, and safety.

Functionally, PFC effectively reduces roadway noise thanks to its lower texture and surface roughness. According to a 2013 Texas A&M study, PFCs have the lowest tire/pavement noise level compared to all types of hot mix asphalt (HMA) surfaces. The average level for typical pavements is 101 dBA, but for PFC, it's 98.1 dBA—a “significant” reduction of almost 3 dBA.

“In some of the more populated areas, instead of putting up sound walls, which

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are very, very expensive, TxDOT would use PFC to quiet the roadway,” Rand said. He’s also witnessed a number of projects, including in Houston and San Antonio, where concrete roads are covered with a layer of PFC to make it quieter.

Because it’s so thin—one to two inches—PFC is easy to compact, and crews can uniformly and quickly pave long sections of roadway.

PFC is durable, too. Due to the addition of polymers, fibers, and additives, such as lime, the asphalt has increased resistance to rutting, and modern PFC can last well past 10 years without having to repave.

However, PFC isn’t the easiest to repair. It’s difficult to patch, and though there are specialty patching mixes out there, they’re not common. It’s also not conducive to hand work.

“You can’t really rake it in place very easily,” Rand said. “It’s for straight, continuous paving, not for stop-and-go paving. Cul de sacs and things like that are not ideal roads for PFC.”

When water flushes into PFC, sediment can build up, decreasing its permeability over time. “That void structure, you need some rain and high-speed traffic to keep it flushed out,” Rand noted.

It also maintains a higher upfront cost. The price of high-grade polymer asphalt, cellulose fibers, and lime add up. A higher asphalt content—typically more than 6 percent, compared to 5 percent in

conventional mixes—contributes to that higher initial cost.

PFC also requires hard, durable, high-friction aggregates, such as SAC A. But in Texas, not all aggregate sources provide that. In East Texas, aggregate is hard to come by and must be shipped from Central and North Texas or Oklahoma.

“You’d love to use it in some of those areas in East Texas that get more rainfall. But they’re having to ship that aggregate a long way,” Rand said. “Any time you have to ship materials a long way, the cost goes up significantly.”

He justifies the cost in terms of the reduced number of wet-weather accidents and fatalities.

“PFC does not need to be used everywhere. But it’s the only mix type that does what it does in terms of safety.”

Safety First

Rand has been a longtime advocate for the use of PFC as a safety measure.

Its coarse surface texture makes for better ride quality and vehicle handling, and its ability to drain water from the roads reduces splash and spray, prevents hydroplaning, and improves pavement marking visibility.

“If you’re driving down the road and you’re not on PFC, and then you get on PFC, it looks like it’s not raining,” Rand said.

PFCs also have superior texture and skid resistance compared to other pavement types. Research shows that high skid resistance mixtures reduce wet-weather accidents by 54 percent and overall accidents by 29 percent.

One roadway left an impression on Rand: FM 1431, a winding, Hill Country route northwest of Austin that’s prone to wet-weather accidents. When Rand drove through it, he noted all the crosses that lined the side of the road, and he began to push for a solution.

That solution was PFC. “It was a major safety improvement in the industry that needs to be used in the right places,” Rand said. FM 1431 was one such place.

In 2003, the Cedar Park Police Department in Travis County, where FM 1431 begins, reported 23 wet-weather accidents on the road. But after overlaying it with PFC, the number of accidents dropped to just two in 2004—despite twice as many rain days that year.

“It’s another tool in the toolbox,” Rand said. “It’s an important one. It doesn’t need to be used everywhere, but it certainly has its place.” Since then, it’s been used on roads across Texas, resulting in significant reductions in fatalities.

“The reality of it is, when it’s your loved ones driving on that roadway...” Rand trailed off. “If my daughter is driving at night in the rain, and I know she’s driving on an undivided road, I hope she’s driving on a PFC mix.” ➤



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Compliance Curveballs

Understanding the latest environmental regulatory updates impacting the industry

By Matt Bellos & Whitney Schwope, Westward Environmental, Inc.

It can be hard to keep up with the ever-changing regulatory landscape on the federal, state, and local levels. Changes continually impact hot mix asphalt plants, quarries, and other industrial facilities.

A New Multi-Sector General Stormwater Permit

Every five years the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) renews the TXR050000 Stormwater General Permit. This Multi-Sector General Stormwater Permit covers several industries, including asphalt production and quarrying.

The current permit expires on August 14, 2026, and hot mix asphalt plant and quarry operations will need to update their stormwater plans to meet the proposed permit changes and renew their Notice of Intent (NOIs) within a 90-day window from August 14 to November 12.

Hot mix asphalt plants are required to maintain a stormwater plan and permit based on the Standard Industrial Clas-

sification (SIC) code that describes the industrial activities occurring onsite. Within the stormwater permit, hot mix asphalt plants are covered under Sector D and quarries under Sector J, which require inspections, stormwater sampling, maintaining a rain gauge, and other responsibilities.

Over the past five years TCEQ gathered information from the public, the state legislature, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), TCEQ staff, and the regulated community. TCEQ has made some administrative updates to the permit and minor technical changes. The permit is still in draft status and TCEQ is reviewing fourteen public comments that were submitted to the agency.

It is expected that a final draft permit will be available for review in summer 2026, and the final permit will be issued





It can be hard to keep up with the ever-changing regulatory landscape on the federal, state, and local levels.

Since the Supreme Court issued the *Sackett v. EPA* decision in 2023, the interpretation of what constitutes a jurisdictional surface water feature, and specifically a wetland, has been in flux. The historically utilized “significant nexus” standard was deemed inconsistent with the interpretation of the act, and the court held that the act’s use of waters encompasses only those “relatively permanent, standing, or continuously flowing bodies of water,” consistent with the *Rapanos* (2009) plurality opinion.

Additionally, the court asserted that adjacent wetlands are jurisdictional WOTUS when the wetlands have a “continuous surface connection” to bodies that are WOTUS in their own right.

Due to litigation, the U.S. is still using two different sets of rules—the amended 2023 rule and the pre-2015 regulatory regime—to effectively determine jurisdiction depending on the state. In Texas, the agencies are interpreting WOTUS consistent with the pre-2015 regulatory regime and the *Sackett* decision, pursuant to their March 2025 guidance memorandum.

Although the agencies have issued updated guidance concerning jurisdictional interpretation of surface water features as a result of the 2023 *Sackett v. EPA* decision and administration changes, the future of WOTUS remains fluid at best.

The most recently proposed rule in November 2025 by the current administra-

expires on November 7, 2026, and ready-mix operations must update their plans to meet the proposed permit changes and renew their NOIs within a 90-day window from November 7 to February 5.

Diving Into Waters of the U.S. Regulatory Updates

The definition and interpretation of federally jurisdictional “Waters of the United States” (WOTUS) has experienced legal and regulatory volatility over the last few years. The term WOTUS generally establishes the geographic scope of federal jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act.

Portions of the act that may be applicable to the aggregate and paving construction industry include the following sections: 303: Water Quality Standards and TMDLs, 311: Oil Spill Programs, 401: State/Tribal Certification, 402: Pollutant Discharge Permits, and 404: Discharge of Dredged and/or Fill Material.

on August 14, 2026. As a permittee, you are unable to renew your NOI until August 14.

This is a great time to re-evaluate your stormwater plan, update your team members, site map, and exposed materials inventory, and add or subtract outfalls, if needed. A renewal NOI will need to be submitted through the TCEQ STEERS online program, and a new copy of the 2026 permit must be included in your stormwater plan.

Renew Your Wastewater and Stormwater General Permit for Ready-Mix Operations

Every five years, TCEQ also renews the TXG110000 Wastewater and Stormwater General Permit for ready-mix concrete operations. The current permit

tion is expected to be finalized sometime this year and provide uniformity among the states.

Notable changes to the definition and regulations relating to WOTUS within the proposed rule include:

- Removing the “interstate waters” category
- Revising exclusion language and addition of definitions for: Waste Treatment Systems, Prior Converted Cropland, and Ditches
- Adding definitions for: Continuous Surface Connection, Relatively Permanent, Tributary
- Requiring adjacent wetlands to maintain a continuous surface connection—they must have surface water at least during the wet season and border another jurisdictional water

Relative to WOTUS and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)—the permitting agency—recently reissued and modified 56 of the existing Nationwide Permits (NWP) and issued one new NWP. These are a type of general permit that can be used to authorize smaller or minimal impacts to WOTUS. NWPs are

typically reviewed and reissued every five years; the most recent changes went into effect on March 15, 2026. Highlights of the modifications include:

1. **Addition of advisory notes** encouraging applicants to engage with the U.S. Coast Guard or National Ocean Service, particularly related to certain NWPs that authorize structures in navigable waters.
2. **Addition of a “Nature-based Solutions”** definition, and encouragement of incorporation of nature-based solutions into projects which include activities that require NWP authorization.
3. **NWP 27** was modified to provide clarity regarding authorized activities and removal of the require-

ment to submit Pre-Construction Notification (PCN) to USACE. It was replaced with a reporting requirement.

4. **NWP 39**, which authorizes activities associated with commercial and institutional developments, was modified to add data centers, pharmaceutical manufacturing, and storage facilities as examples of projects which may result in regulated activities authorized by this NWP.
5. **NWP 48** was modified to exclude its use in Washington state.
6. **NWP 60**, a new NWP, authorizes discharges, work, and structures associated with activities to improve the passage of fish and aquatic organisms. 🇺🇸

Get in Touch

If you have questions or are curious how these regulations may affect your specific operation, reach out.

Contact:

Matt Bellos at mbellos@westwardenv.com or
Whitney Schwope at wschwope@westwardenv.com.

Or, call Westward Environmental, Inc., at 830-249-8284.



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Building Texas Together

Women of Asphalt Texas celebrates support across the industry

By Emily Adams



Founded in 2021, Women of Asphalt Texas quickly became the largest Women of Asphalt branch in the nation. In a profession that had already offered women meaningful opportunities for job security, skills development, and career advancement, many were curious about what an organization like Women of Asphalt could bring to the table.

From the beginning, one thing that mattered most to branch leadership was building a bridge between the women and men of the asphalt pavement industry. Texas women working in asphalt consistently reported that hard work, willingness to learn, and strong mentorship were the true pathways to success—and that the people helping them

along the way were often both women and men. In such an environment, there was never any question that men would be welcomed as Women of Asphalt members and supporters, too.

As the branch began to grow and become increasingly active across the state, that philosophy shaped every event and initiative. While attendance was always strong, branch leaders recognized an unusual challenge: how to ensure people understood that Women of Asphalt events were not simply events men could attend, but events where their presence and participation were genuinely valued. Men were never viewed as outsiders accompanying female colleagues. They were, and continue to be, an important part of the audience Women of Asphalt Texas hopes to serve—the full Texas asphalt pavement industry.

That perspective reflects the organization's broader mission. Women of Asphalt Texas was established to sup-

The 2026 Women of Asphalt Annual Hill Country Networking Event in Fredericksburg, TX.



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Women of Asphalt Texas would like to thank our 2026 branch partners for their support and investment in the future of the asphalt industry.

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port women working in asphalt and to strengthen the asphalt pavement workforce across the state. For that reason, the branch has always celebrated the diversity of its supporters, including the many men who actively encourage, mentor, and champion the women they work alongside every day.

Sometimes that support happens at the institutional level, with companies investing in professional development, encouraging employees to attend conferences, or creating opportunities for women to step into leadership roles. Other times, it happens in quieter, personal ways: inviting someone into the conversation, encouraging them to speak up in a meeting, or recognizing potential they may not yet see in themselves.

The asphalt pavement industry has always been built on teamwork. No project succeeds because of one person alone. Contractors, producers, engineers, inspectors, suppliers, and agency partners all rely on one another to move Texas infrastructure forward. Supporting and encouraging the next generation of professionals is simply an extension of that same collaborative spirit.

That spirit is also what makes the upcoming Women of Asphalt Supporter Dinner at the TXAPA Annual Meeting especially meaningful. The event is designed as an opportunity for people

from every corner of the industry to connect, share experiences, and continue building relationships that strengthen the asphalt community in Texas. Whether attendees have supported Women of Asphalt for years or are simply curious to learn more, the invitation is the same.

As Women of Asphalt Texas continues to grow, the branch remains proud of the broad support it receives across the industry. The goal has never been division. The goal is to strengthen the workforce, support professional growth, and ensure talented people see a future for themselves in asphalt.

That's something the Texas asphalt industry continues to build together. 📍

Interested in getting involved, attending an event, or becoming a supporter? Scan the QR code to learn more about Women of Asphalt Texas.



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Talk is Not Cheap

Poor communication costs time and money

By Keaton Hernandez, Adult Learning Director, APEX

In the asphalt industry, communication isn't just a soft skill, it's a production tool. From pre-pave meetings and plant calls to job site adjustments in real time, every outcome that matters is influenced by how well information moves between people. We talk constantly—over the phone, in texts, through emails, and face-to-face—but frequency doesn't guarantee effectiveness.

The real question isn't whether we're communicating. It's whether we're communicating well enough to keep projects moving safely, efficiently, and without costly mistakes.

Why Communication Matters

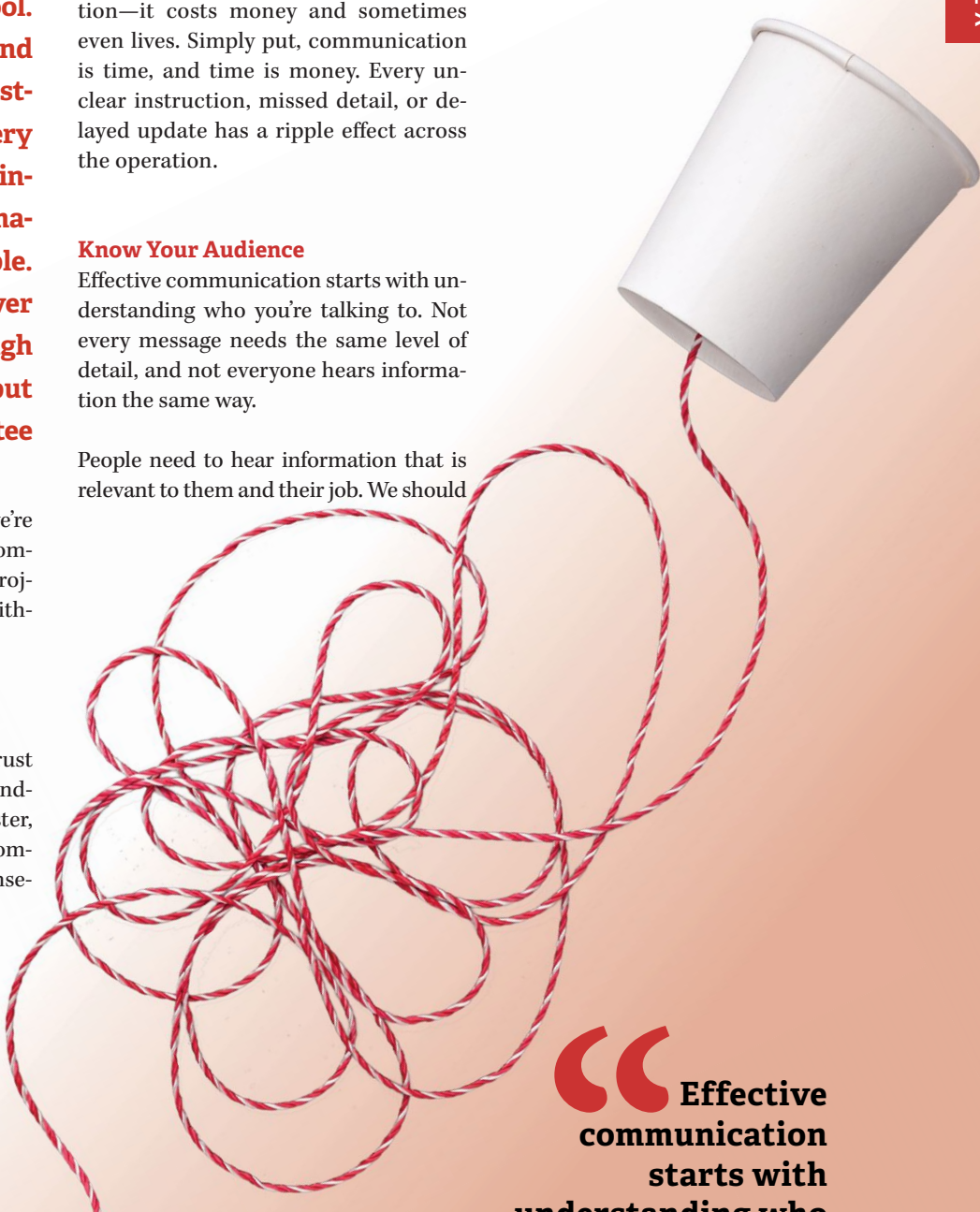
Strong communication builds trust across crews, reduces misunderstandings, and allows teams to make faster, more confident decisions. When communication breaks down, the consequences are immediate and tangible: lost time, rework, safety risks, and strained relationships.

In a field where schedules are tight and margins can be even tighter, poor communication doesn't just create frustration—it costs money and sometimes even lives. Simply put, communication is time, and time is money. Every unclear instruction, missed detail, or delayed update has a ripple effect across the operation.

Know Your Audience

Effective communication starts with understanding who you're talking to. Not every message needs the same level of detail, and not everyone hears information the same way.

People need to hear information that is relevant to them and their job. We should



“Effective communication starts with understanding who you're talking to.”



consider giving context where context may have not been given before. For example, if we use a certain mix for intersections, it would be helpful for the crew to know why that type of mix is laid in that location.

Communication happens on the recipient's terms. In other words, we don't control how our message is received, only how we deliver it. The listener's experience, perspective, and priorities shape how they interpret what we say.

That means effective communicators don't just focus on what they want to say, they focus on what the other person needs to hear. Tailoring your message to who you're talking to means making it digestible for that person or group of people.

Clarity is a Skill

When we communicate clearly, it shows clear thinking. The more organized your talking points are, the easier it is for people to understand you. Whether you're talking or writing, aim for structure: a clear beginning, middle, and end. Start with the purpose, provide the necessary details, and close with the next step.

Just as important is simplicity. Plain language beats technical language in most day-to-day interactions. The goal isn't to impress. It's to ensure the message lands accurately and effectively.

Choose the Right Approach

Not all communication styles are created equal. Some create understanding, others create noise.

- Passive communication avoids expressing needs altogether.



At its core, good communication is purposeful. It's about being clear on what needs to be said, thoughtful about how it's delivered, and listening just as well as you speak.

- Passive-aggressive communication masks frustration without addressing it directly.
- Aggressive communication prioritizes one person's needs at the expense of others, often fueled by emotion.

Each of these approaches introduces friction, making it harder for the message itself to be heard.

The most effective alternative is assertive, or straight-forward, communication—a direct, respectful, and balanced approach. Straight-forward communicators are clear about what they need while remaining open and respectful to others. It's a “win-win” mindset that prioritizes both the message and the relationship.

Removing emotion from communication is also critical. When emotions dominate, the message gets buried. Clarity comes from separating what needs to be said from how we feel in the moment. It's much easier to listen when the emotional noise isn't there to distract us from the message.

Don't Forget the Other Half: Listening

Communication isn't just about delivering information—it's about receiving it. And this is where many breakdowns occur. Most people listen to respond, not

to understand. In fast-paced environments, it's easy to jump to conclusions or prepare your reply before the other person has finished speaking. But doing so increases the likelihood of a misunderstanding. A useful communication tool is to treat what you hear as neutral data. Listen without immediate judgment. Understand first, then respond.

Active listening requires purpose. It means giving your full attention, setting aside distractions, and focusing on what's being said, not what you assume is being said. It means asking questions to gain a better understanding and resisting the urge to interrupt. It also involves nonverbal cues: eye contact, open body language, and presence. You can't fully listen while checking your phone or thinking about your next task. When attention is divided, so is understanding.

Why This Matters

No matter your role in the asphalt industry, communication is a constant. It happens in planning meetings, on the job site, between plants and crews, and in the quick decisions that keep work moving forward. It connects every part of the job. And while experience sharpens many technical skills over time, communication is one area where improvement is always possible and valuable.

At its core, good communication is purposeful. It's about being clear on what needs to be said, thoughtful about how it's delivered, and listening just as well as you speak. When done right, it reduces friction, strengthens teamwork, and keeps projects running smoothly. In an industry built on precision, timing, and coordination, communication isn't just part of the job, it is the job. The more deliberately we approach it, the more value we create—not just in what we say, but in what is understood. 📍

2026

Calendar of Events

TXAPA Events

Registration is now open!

September 14, 2026

TXAPA Golf Tournament
Hyatt Regency Hill Country
Resort and Spa
San Antonio, TX

September 14–17, 2026

51st Annual Meeting
Hyatt Regency Hill
Country Resort and Spa
San Antonio, TX

Conferences

TXAPA is exhibiting at the following events.
Come by our booth and say hello!

August 20, 2026

North Central Texas Council
of Governments (NCTCOG)
Public Works Roundup
Hurst Conference Center
Hurst, TX

August 30–September 2, 2026

American Public
Works Association
(APWA) National Congress
George Brown Convention Center
Houston, TX

September 16–18, 2026

American Society of Civil En-
gineers (ASCE) Civil Engineer-
ing Conference and Exhibition
(CECON)
Hilliard Center
Corpus Christi, TX

October 5–8, 2026

104th Annual County Judges
and Commissioners
Association of Texas
Conference
Waco Convention Center
Waco, TX

October 12–14, 2026

Texas Department of
Transportation (TxDOT)
Short Course
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX

October 19–22, 2026

Texas Association of County
Engineers and Roadway
Administrators (TACERA)
Waco Convention
Center Waco, TX

TxDOT Letting Schedule 2026

Aug. 5–6
Sept. 2–3
Oct. 6–7
Nov. 3–4
Dec. 1–2

2027

Jan. 6–7
Feb. 2–3
March 3–4
April 6–7
May 5–6
June 1–2
July 1–2
Aug. 4–5
Sept. 1–2
Oct. 5–6
Nov. 2–3
Dec. 1–2

2028

Jan. 5–6
Feb. 2–3
March 7–8
April 5–6
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