

Road crews fight ice with chemical

Compound used to melt buildups on bridges, overpasses

By Stephanie Sandoval
Staff Writer of the
Arlington Morning News

Grand Prairie street crews have a new weapon in their arsenal to keep bridges and overpasses ice-free.

When a light rain turned to ice on some bridges early Wednesday morning, street crews began laying down MeltDown20 rather than covering them with sand. The magnesium chloride compound helps melt the ice.

"It's not like salt. It's non-corrosive and it actually melts the ice so you can drive on the pavement itself, instead of trying to drive on ice with sand on it," Street Services Manager Ronnie Bates said.

■ GP copes with weather

4A

MeltDown20 could come in handy for Grand Prairie Thursday. Winter went easy on the Arlington-D/FW area Wednesday, bringing only spotty freezing drizzle and a hint of snow, but commuters could awake to ice-coated roads again Thursday.

Mr. Bates said he used MeltDown20 in Lewisville, where he worked for the last eight years. He began working for the city of Grand Prairie about two months ago.

The city didn't have the product in time for the Dec. 12 ice storm, but began using it early Wednesday.

It's the same product that Arlington has been using for several years.

Most other cities in the area use only sand, Mr. Bates said.

"That just gives vehicles the traction they need," Mr. Bates said.

Robbin Webber, Arlington's assistant street superintendent, said the magnesium chloride reacts with the water and generates heat, which melts the ice.

The product, a dark brown compound with white nodules, resembles plant fertilizer.

"It's not a salt product, so it's not as corrosive," Mr. Webber said. "It doesn't get into the water system and cause problems."

Dewayne Collins, street supervisor for the city of Kennedale, said his department only uses sand for streets, and a product called Ice

Please see Freezing on Page 3A

Freezing rain, ice threaten area again

Continued from Page 1A

Melt for sidewalks. Mansfield street officials did not return a voice mail message left Wednesday.

After storms socked other areas of Texas and surrounding states, freezing rain and icy conditions threatened the Arlington-D/FW area late Tuesday and early Wednesday. But little precipitation materialized, leaving only patchy problem areas Wednesday morning.

Rain and sleet began falling early Wednesday evening. The conditions were expected to turn into a slick mix of sleet and snow overnight as temperatures dropped below freezing, said Troy Dungan, chief forecaster for WFAA-TV (Channel 8).

MeltDown20 is effective to -10 degrees Fahrenheit, according to a brochure from the manufacturer, Envirotech Services Inc. of Greeley, Colo. It draws out moisture to form melting brines that break the bond between ice or snow and the road surface.

Officials from Envirotech did not return a phone message left at the company late Wednesday afternoon.

The product is more expensive than sand, costing about \$450 per ton. Sand costs about \$20 a cubic yard, or about \$35 per ton.

But Mr. Bates said they use much less MeltDown20 than sand. That, coupled with the fact that MeltDown20 doesn't have to be reapplied as often as sand makes it a more economical way to handle icy bridges and streets, he said.

About 100 pounds of MeltDown20 is required per lane mile — about a third of the amount of sand that would be needed, Mr. Bates said.

Arlington crews use a combination of sand and magnesium chloride.

"You still have to put something out for traction, and the chloride doesn't provide any of that," Mr. Webber said.



WINTER WATCH

- * Beware of icy road conditions and avoid frozen bridges and overpasses if possible. To check road conditions, go to the Texas Department of Transportation's Web site (www.dfwtraffic.org) or call 1-800-452-9292.
- * Wear warm clothing.
- * Check fireplace flue for any thick soot blocking the passage of smoke through the chimney.
- * When using a space heater, make sure flammable materials are not near the appliance.

SOURCES: Arlington Fire Department and Texas Department of Transportation.

Arlington Morning News

On Tuesday night, Arlington street crews put out about 60,000 tons of sand and about 500 pounds of MeltDown20.

Mr. Bates said that Grand Prairie street crews laid down sand as they came across icy patches on Wednesday morning, but made a note of the location and returned later with the MeltDown20.

He said sand must be reapplied every 30 minutes to an hour to keep providing traction. MeltDown 20 only needs to be reapplied every four to six hours.

Mr. Bates also said that sand leaves a mess that must be cleaned up after the wintry weather subsides.

The natural complex chloride in MeltDown20 contains essential minerals and nutrients that replenish leached out soil and damaged plant life, the company literature said.

"A couple of Texas Department of Transportation divisions up north use it and they like it real well," Mr. Bates said.

Staff Writer Jason Trahan and Colleen McCain Nelson of The Dallas Morning News contributed to this report.