

In Genesee Co., keeping roads fresh is messy job

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(AP) — VIENNA TOWNSHIP, Mich. - It's pothole season and the job of filling them isn't what you would call fun.

The asphalt is messy and has a musty smell. Cars whiz by in excess of 50 miles per hour in the work zone.

It's monotonous. It's dangerous. And it's hard work.

"It's a pretty thankless job," Genesee County Road Commission worker Jeff Rotenheber said recently. "People are ticked when they hit a pothole, and they're ticked at you when they have to go around you when you're working."

Road commission workers are at their busiest this spring, repairing roads throughout the county hit hard by the brutal winter.

"This spring, I've done it for two months straight," said worker Ralph Laugavitz. "That's all we did."

Workers spent one entire day filling potholes on a mile-long stretch of Saginaw Road between Lake and Willard roads in Vienna Township, about 65 miles north-northwest of Detroit.

"Since winter's been over, they've been right in our area," said Ron Green, 65, of Vienna Township. "There's a few places around Clio that's been bad for a while."

James Landon of Mount Morris is used to the potholes.

"It's pretty systemic with springtime," he said. "It's just part of living in this great state of ours."

The process of filling potholes is simple enough.

Two workers walk behind a truck loaded with about 6 tons of asphalt-made up of rock and tar-based glue-and scoop up a shovelful and lay it down.

But it's hard manual labor. One shovelful weighs about 30 pounds.

"Your shoulders are aching when you are doing it everyday," Rotenheber said. "It keeps your upper body strong."

The workers start at 6 a.m. and usually work in fours as they make their way across the 2,000 miles of road the county maintains.

One drives the truck with the asphalt. Two fill potholes. The fourth follows in a pickup truck to warn motorists they are entering a work zone.

They work on one-mile stretches at a time with the knowledge their efforts will eventually be obliterated.

Patched-up Vienna Road will be repaved later this year, but the road commission still has to maintain it until then.

"You don't want people to bust tires or bend rims," Laugavitz said.

Rotenheber said although the work gets boring sometimes, he still enjoys it. "Everything you do makes a difference."

