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### The axle-eaters of Waterloo Region

#### Pothole patrols are using new tools in the annual battle against buckled and broken roads

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RECORD STAFF

WATERLOO REGION

Grit your teeth. Pothole season 2009 has arrived.

But city officials predict we won't see a repeat of last year's bone-jarring road show.

"Things are under control, not near as bad as last year," said Phil Hewitson, operations manager at the City of Waterloo.

This winter's steady weather has helped crews keep potholes in check, said Scott Berry, Kitchener's operations manager.

There's been no yo-yo of warm-cold temperatures like last winter. Warm days allow water to seep into cracked asphalt. When temperatures drop, the water freezes, heaving road surfaces or popping pothole patches, Berry said.

"I'm optimistic we're going to be able to handle it better this year than we were able to do last year," said Phil Dechene, public works manager in Cambridge.

"Last year was a bad year. It was a bad season for everybody, all across the province."

Cambridge and Kitchener have equipped their pothole patrols with new tools this year. After a futile effort last year watching traffic grind cold-patch asphalt out of potholes within days -- sometimes hours -- Cambridge has beefed up its efforts.

Through the summer, the city started a spot repaving effort on rutted roads, where a veneer of fresh asphalt covered rough spots motorists loathed, like Queen Street in front of the Hespeler beer store. Some decaying roads -- like rutted Munch Avenue -- were repaved.

This winter, Cambridge road crews won't be shovelling much cold patch. Instead, the city is trucking in hot mix asphalt from a plant in Toronto because it sticks better.

While more expensive than cold mix, the hot patches are more durable and likely more cost effective in the long run, Dechene said.

Cambridge has also rented two pothole-busting asphalt cookers from a Kitchener company. They're little trailers that can melt old asphalt chunks for re-use to fill potholes.

They're made by Heat Design on Bleams Road.

"Asphalt is actually the number one recycled product in the world," said Matt Kieswetter, the company's secretary-treasurer.

His company has "quite a few" of the asphalt cookers out for rent this year in Canada.

He's going to a big road builders' trade show in North Carolina this week, where he's hoping to sell more.

Kitchener continues to use "hot box" trailers to give crews a fresh supply of sticky, warm asphalt, Berry said. This year, he's testing an asphalt spreader to fill potholes from a dump truck. A worker can drive up, drop hot asphalt into a hole, then drive over it to pack it while on the way to the next hole, he said.

Kitchener and Cambridge are talking about sharing loads of hot asphalt this year, before local asphalt plants open by April.

Waterloo isn't doing anything different in its pothole effort this year, but is watching Cambridge's hot patch asphalt experiments closely, Hewitson said.

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