



Repairing Parking Lots & Sidewalks Before Winter

As the asset manager or property manager, it is important to complete a visual inspection of the stairs leading up to the building, the building's sidewalk, as well as the city sidewalk (*diocesan insureds are responsible and each city may have its own ordinance with regard to the property owner's duty to repair/maintain sidewalks, and liability. Each location should review their respective city ordinances with regard to sidewalks, most are accessible via the city's website or by contacting the city*), and the associated parking lot. Whatever damages exist now, they will most likely be compounded once the winter arrives.

Melting snow and freezing rain will find their way into the cracks in the concrete steps, sidewalk, and parking lot. With moisture in the cracks and under the concrete and bituminous surfaces, the freezing weather will transition water to expanding ice resulting in the surface(s) to lift up creating further hazards to the pedestrians.

Further damage will occur when these lifted sections of surface are hit by someone snow plowing the parking lot resulting in Spring cleanup repairs to sidewalks and parking lots.

A walk-around with camera and note pad in hand, one can inventory the existing conditions of the entrance into a building or home, the sidewalk leading to the facility, and the adjacent parking lot. As the saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Building owners should have a long-range deferred maintenance plan and financial reserves in place to address repairs that don't fall into the annual repair budget category and these repairs may be forecasted to occur once every 15 or 20-years. In the meantime,



unscheduled repairs can and do occur. An ounce of prevention will often help to ensure these deferred maintenance repairs don't occur sooner than planned.

Stairs leading up to a building entrance can begin to fail sooner than anticipated. For example, brick and mortar steps can fail over time based on chemicals used to provide de-icing protection and/or when moisture finds its way between the brick and mortar joint. The wrong type of chemical used can deteriorate the mortar. Bricks can show signs of cracking but not much will happen to the brick. The weak link is always the mortar. One should read the de-icing instructions on the bag to make sure the material is not harmful to the concrete joints between the bricks.

Another potential deficiency in these stairs may be how the stairs settle on the footing over time. As a

result of a poorly built footing for the stairs to rest on, with time the stairs may not be level from one side to the other side or the steps may simply fall away from the building.

Cracks in sidewalks are quite common when the sidewalks are constructed of concrete. As a rule, these sidewalks their construction seams may begin to separate one section of walkway from another section of walkway. The design intent is to accommodate expansion of the concrete so it won't crack under the thermal expansion and contraction pressure of the surface temperature throughout the year.

Unfortunately, melting snow and freezing rain can find its way into these seams and eventually lift a section of concrete, as well as create cracks in the concrete surface. These problems can become tripping hazards for the pedestrians using the walkway.

Visual inspection of curbing, both concrete and bituminous, should be part of the pre-Winter survey to make sure these curbs are correctly in place, although they may eventually get hit by a snow plow damaging the curb and/or moving it from its proper location. Concrete sidewalk edging, as well as bituminous curbs can be prone to deterioration over time. Depending of the Fall inspection, the weather may be too cold for a contractor to repair the curbing and this will need to be scheduled as a repair project next year.

With a vigilant eye towards condition assessment of parking lots, short term repairs can be as simple as hiring a contractor to seal cracks in the paving using a hot liquid tar solution to seal the cracks. This can help delay the cost of parking lot replacement for several years to come. While inspecting the parking lots and sealing the surface cracks it may be a good time to repaint the parking lot stripes both the white line and the yellow safety lines.

Of course pot holes in the parking lot should also be repaired by having a contractor fill these holes with bituminous and when done, one should consider sealing the repaired spot(s) if not seal the entire parking lot to extend the surface life of this area.

Last but not least is to inspect these areas for missing covers e.g., cast iron or steel access cover to a city water shut off valve well below grade. Missing covers can be a tripping hazard, as well as a potential contributor to moisture finding its way under the surface resulting in further damage to the parking lot.

Proactive asset management routinely implemented beginning with a visual inspection can avoid unnecessary costs to the building owner, as well as avoid potential legal issues due to a pedestrian tripping and falling from a damaged stair, sidewalk, or parking lot hazard.

Often, educated investment decisions in repairs rather than in replacements can extend the life of these assets. It is recommended that visual inspections be performed annually either by the property management firm, an experienced consultant, or a local contractor. If repairs are not done following the walk-around then these itemized repairs should be included in next year's operating budget.

For assistance assessing your facility parking lot, or finding a qualified concrete or paving contractor, please contact a member of the Diocese of Cleveland Facilities Services Corporation.

For more information:
facilities@dioceseofcleveland.org

