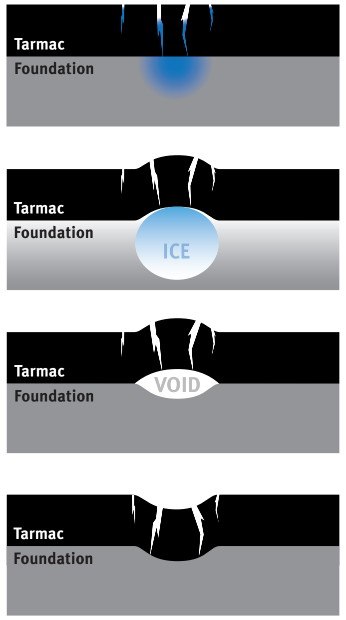
CASH IN THE POT HOLE

Potholes destroy springs! The scourge of drivers everywhere - Britain's roads are once again blighted by fresh potholes following the snowfall and freezing temperatures which welcomed 2013. Suspension systems, including coil springs, are especially vulnerable to pothole damage, and up to a third of all reported mechanical problems are due to a suspension issue. Spending cuts, budget shortfalls, and a huge backlog of potholes still waiting to be repaired means the problem will continue to get worse, while the future of the coil spring market looks positive.



Tarmac becomes porous and rain begins to penetrate the cracks.

As the water freezes it expands, pushing the tarmac upwards.

The ice thaws, leaving a void below the surface which grows larger with each freeze-thaw cycle.

Eventually, the tarmac collapses into the void, creating a pothole

Freshly laid tarmac forms a solid, impermeable barrier between the soft foundation under the road, and the elements above.

Over time, with traffic volume acting as a catalyst, the tarmac becomes more porous and rain begins to penetrate the cracks. In winter, as the water freezes it expands, pushing the tarmac upwards. The thawing ice leaves gaps below the surface, which fill with water and become larger with each freeze-thaw cycle.

Eventually, the vibration and weight of the traffic above causes the tarmac to collapse into the void, creating a pothole which grows larger and deeper the more traffic rolls over it.

Adding additional rain proofing to road surfaces at the first sign of wear could prevent new potholes from forming, and is considerably cheaper and faster than resurfacing an entire road.

Unfortunately, local authorities find themselves fighting a losing battle; the average road resurfacing time in England has grown to 54 years (107 years in Wales), and councils currently spend an average of 25% of their annual road maintenance budget on unplanned 'reactive maintenance,' which includes pothole repair.

Instead of being proactive, councils are forced to treat the costly symptoms rather than the cause.

It is estimated that clearing the current road maintenance backlog would take 12 years and cost £140 million. Councils already repair over 2 million potholes each year, so the fact that such a large backlog exists demonstrates the scale of the problem.

The Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) reports that one in five roads in England and Wales are considered to be in a poor condition, while 94% of English authorities believe they will have to make cuts to their highway maintenance services.

Data on European comparisons is not readily available but it is certainly clear that the problem is not isolated to the UK and many countries, especially in Eastern Europe, have a similar or worse situation.

There are notable exceptions however such as the Netherlands which mandates annual inspections of all road surfaces, with the data being input into a 'damage prediction model,' allowing preventative maintenance to replace road surfaces before damage is expected. Sweden's roads too have minimal surface damage, with roads divided into five classes, based on their size and daily traffic levels; each road has an inspection interval of between two and 14 days depending on the class. Sweden's objective is to keep main roads free of potholes wider than 10cm, and minor roads free of potholes wider than 15cm.

According to the UK Local Government Association, the budget for Highway Maintenance, given to councils by the Department for Transport, is set to be reduced by £442 million over 4 years, resulting in £164 million less per year from 2014/15 than in 2010/11.

£140 Million
12 Years
Cost of clearing the current road maintenance backlog

94% of English authorities believe they will have to make cuts to their highway maintenance services

Additionally, if a vehicle suffers suspension damage as a result of running over a pothole, the local authority may be liable for the cost of the repair. In 2012, councils in England and Wales paid more than £30 million in compensation and spent over 50,000 staff days processing the claims. This is a problem which is not going away!

The sheer number of potholes means that coil springs are under attack - year round - from the road below. Add to this the effects of cold weather – grit salt forms an abrasive paste when mixed with water, grinding the protective paint off the spring and leading to corrosion – and the result is that coil springs break more frequently.

Because the cost of replacing a spring is often more than the spring itself (even with Lesjöfors quality) there is an incentive for garages to fit quality, durable aftermarket springs as opposed to cheap budget brands: Especially when one considers that liability for spring replacements caused by pothole damage often sits with the local authority rather than the motorist.

Lesjöfors springs, produced in Sweden, are designed to withstand the harshest conditions of a Scandinavian winter. Each Lesjöfors spring is made from the highest-quality, specialist spring-steel and protected from corrosion by the galvanic protection method of zinc phosphating, before being powder-coated with epoxy resin to provide additional protection.

Lesjöfors supply springs to the likes of Volvo, and all Lesjöfors aftermarket springs are classified as parts of matching OE quality, allowing fitment without warranty restrictions. Fit and forget – the Lesjöfors standard!

Lesjöfors UK are centrally located and operate a robust distribution network in partnership with many of the country's largest automotive distributors, covering the whole of the UK and Ireland.

No matter the conditions, the spring you need is never far away! Make sure you're ready for the post-winter rush by keeping your Lesjöfors coil spring range up to date.

LESJÖFORS

www.lesjofors-automotive.com