

The snow is finally melting, and you washed your normally immaculate car for the first time in several months, knocking off several layers of road salt and mud from the exterior. You then vacuum at least ten pounds of gravel from the floor mats. As you travel home with a carload of groceries, ker-thunk! The eggs crash to the tailgate, breaking at least one-third of them. A case of Diet Coke explodes over two loaves of bread and several boxes of cereal, soaking both. The sticky liquid is now splattered all over the interior of your car, including the ceiling. And so the rant begins: “Why don’t they fix these potholes!?!”

Potholes are a significant problem in many cities in the Midwest, including Concordia. The freeze-thaw cycles, which usually occur in late winter, can cause extreme stress to pavement. Snow and ice melts during the day and settles into cracks and holes in the pavement, then refreezes with the onset of colder nighttime temperatures. The ice exerts tremendous force great enough to fracture concrete and asphalt, and lift it away from the subbase, causing potholes to form as vehicles drive over the heaved pavement. Most potholes form in late winter and early spring when rain or snowmelt seeps into cracks in the pavement and freezes overnight, then later thaws. Concordia has experienced the third wettest winter in recorded history, with 46.9 inches of snowfall for the 2018-2019 winter season. When coupled with Kansas’ typical average of 80 freeze/thaw cycles per year, our city streets reap the not-so-desirable reward: potholes and pavement failures.

City crews repair potholes year-round. The pothole must be clean and dry for the patch to effectively bond to the surrounding pavement.

Pavement failures can also occur when the subbase becomes saturated and freezes. As it thaws and additional moisture seeps downward, erosion can occur. As heavy vehicles drive over the saturated subbase as it thaws, the gravel, rock, or asphalt millings are displaced to the sides, resulting in rutting of the street, alley or driveway.

City crews address street failures on a case-by-case basis. Widespread yet shallow surface pavement failures can be addressed similar to that of a pothole. Significant failures of the subbase may require City crews to remove a section of the pavement and subbase and replace it. They may prioritize sections of large repairs to address immediate safety needs, and plan to return during the summer for a larger-scale replacement, especially if a mill and overlay project is planned in the area. As the ground dries out and firms up enough to support heavy equipment, City crews will grade the unpaved streets and alleys to repair rutting. They will also add gravel or rock to help fill potholes that may still be present in these areas.

The extraordinary amount of snowfall in Concordia this winter will take a toll on the city’s budget. As previously reported, the City has purchased more salt this year than planned, and has incurred more overtime expense than planned for snow removal. In order to reserve budget for the start of the 2019-2020 winter snow removal season, which will begin prior to the start of the City’s next fiscal year in January, budget adjustments for the current fiscal year will occur by reducing the amount of pavement maintenance done during 2019. Please rest assured potholes will be filled and street failures will be addressed; however, some planned alley overlays may be delayed.

The same crew of six City employees who removed the snow from streets also repairs the potholes and street failures. They travel our streets daily and are fully aware of areas in need of attention. They will begin patching potholes as soon as the pavement is dry enough to effectively receive the patch. They will begin repair of rutted, unpaved streets and alleys as soon as the ground is firm enough to support the heavy equipment necessary to do this work. City park crew members may also assist City street crews to expedite pothole repair, provided equipment and supplies are available, and park crew workload permits them to assist.

On behalf of the City Commission and City staff, we thank you for your patience as we work to repair our streets this year.

*Sources:*

<https://www.pothole.info/2014/12/freeze-thaw-cycles-expansions-and-contractions-cause-potholes/>