

TRAFFIC AND SAFETY INFORMATIONAL SERIES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION #19

How does the county make decisions about controlling dust on gravel roadways?

As anyone who lives near or travels on a dusty roadway knows, dust can be an annoyance. It can get in your eyes and make it hard to breathe. Heavy dust can also be a safety hazard because of the reduced visibility it can cause at roadway intersections and curves. Dust means the loss of roadway material, and this can lead to road deterioration, washboarding, ruts, and potholes.

How the state defines the problem

Road dust consists of fine particles that feel like powder when rubbed between your fingers. Most dust control strategies are aimed at reducing “fugitive dust,” which consists of airborne particles but not those emitted from a flue or stack and not those generated from farming operations or *ordinary travel on unpaved roads*.

What is the county policy on dust control?

Many Iowa counties have approved dust control policies that specify procedures for public dust control applications and a permitting process for private application of dust control material. Talk to your local county engineer for the specific policy and procedures followed in your particular county.

What is used to control the dust

Waste oil is no longer used to control dust because it may contain contaminants. Many other dust control materials can be used (for example, calcium chloride, magnesium chloride, and lignin sulfate). The dust control materials are usually applied by coating the road surface to reduce the interaction of the road surface and the tires traveling over it. A list of approved dust control materials and application procedures is maintained by each county.

The cost of dust control

The cost of dust control varies with the type of materials used. The cost to treat all of the unpaved roads in a typical Iowa county is estimated to be as high as two to three million dollars per year.

One solution

The application of dust control materials is expensive, and counties cannot afford to apply dust control materials on every gravel road. As a solution, counties sometimes allow the general public (with proper permits) to apply dust control materials on unpaved county roads next to their property. Permits must be acquired from the appropriate county or counties, usually through the county engineer’s office. Permittees may be required to meet certain specifications related to the application of the dust control materials.

For more information

For more information, please contact _____.