



The Società delle Autostrade di Venezia e Padova plans to implement self-service facilities for the dispensing of deicing salt.

EXPERIENCES OF THE FIRST OPERATING SEASON

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During the sessions of the international meeting on winter road maintenance held in December 2002 in Ortisei di Valgardena, we were extended the invitation to demonstrate the facility designed and built by the Società Agristrade SpA of Bolzano.

In view of the high technical content characterising the discussions, the conference chairperson, Maria Pia Cerciello, invited us to organise a special visit with participation by industry experts. This led to the organisation of the May 2003 event at our Venice-Mestre Maintenance Centre attended by numerous technicians from Austria, Germany and Italy. The characteristics of the facility have been described in detail on previous occasions, hence we will limit ourselves here to commenting on the results of the first season of operation, 2002-2003, illustrated to participants.

Among the many advantages noted in the use of the silo which have enabled an improvement in the winter road maintenance - made more onerous due to the heavy traffic conditions on the motorways we administer -- the most significant is the speed with which the facilities can discharge the salt. Since the procedure is automatic and requires only one operator, this has led to a reduction in the total time to perform maintenance, preventive or in response to a snow emergency, with respect to previous years.

The time necessary to put all salt spreaders into operation and start treatment has been reduced by an average of 80% as compared to the past. The self-service facility completely eliminates the time required for transferring the vehicles from the parking area to the outdoor storage area approx. 1.5 km away, for loading of the salt using the wheel loader, and for the final unloading of unutilised salt. It also considerably reduces the wait time of the vehicles for the loading of the salt and the time necessary for the actual loading.

Precise record-keeping and automatic storage into memory of each operation also means that the work performed by outside companies contracted to perform salt spreading can be immediately checked. To our satisfaction, we noted a savings in the costs of the ice prevention service performed by outside companies last winter of about 30% over the previous year owing to a reduction in the maintenance times and in the elimination of the wheel loader operator who loaded the salt spreaders.

Automatic salt discharge

Another result was the considerable savings (approx. 25%) in the quantity of salt used for spreading compared to past years, a factor attributable both to improved efficiency as a result of the speed in road maintenance service and to the purity of the salt. In fact, the rock salt of the facility guarantees a higher effectiveness than less pure salt piled in outdoor storage yards, even when covered by tarpaulins, which is subject to packing and dirtying, in addition to the potential runoff and the related ecological problems.

In conclusion, right from the first year, we met several important goals and achieved a more rational use of employees and personnel contracted to carry out the deicing service. Moreover, we noted a higher quality of winter road maintenance due to the quick response, translating into improved road safety and notable economic savings.

What remains to be achieved is the goal of using the silo for self-service salt dispensing i.e., to have the same facility or other new ones similar to it used by other authorities that oversee road maintenance across the territory where the motorway intersects. This would lead to obvious financial benefits with the investments and management expenses split among several entities, but the prime objective of course would be to provide motorists with better service. These future developments are already taking shape in the Regione Veneto, in particular at Veneto Strade SpA, the company that oversees management of the former state roads now administered by the region and composed of the Regione Veneto, the Provinces and by the motorway administrations.

The highly publicised nature of the Venice-Padua motorway has historically attracted attention to the special needs of this territory and the action to be taken to satisfy them.

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