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County to test new road technology this fall

By John Finefrock
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The Archuleta County Public Works Department is considering implementing a road technology called lithification that could bring down the cost of reconstructing a mile of road from \$1 million to \$250,000.

"The reason we're so excited about this is we want to repair these roads that are in need of repair and we can do more [with lithification]," said Matt Archuleta, operations manager for the Public Works Department. "Versus a million dollars a mile, we can do a mile of road for \$250,000 and these roads are gonna last 20 years, so that's giving the taxpayers the best bang for their buck."

According to a flyer from Lithified Technologies that details the technology, lithification is a natural process that "gradually turns soil to rock over many years," but chemicals used in the company's accelerated lithification process cause that to happen in just 24 hours.

The flyer also explains that "roads

wear from the top down, but they fail from the bottom up" and that using lithification in the base layer of roads creates a foundation that will last for decades and that "you get a lower overall cost while producing a better, longer lasting road."

Archuleta explained that the base layer of current failing paved roads in Archuleta County is "just the old asphalt that's crumbling and it doesn't do any good to seal it or patch it," but that lithification creates a solid rock base that lasts for 20 years.

Additionally, roads can be reconstructed by grinding up materials that are already in the road, and using the lithification technology the chemicals can turn a ground up asphalt road into a solid rock base that will last decades.

"Once we do a road, we're not going to have to go back and fill a lot of potholes or fill cracks because they're not going to be there because water is not going to be allowed to go into the foundation and we're going to maintain the top portion at much lower costs," said Archuleta.

Archuleta also explained the cost for materials goes up every year and that by reusing existing material in the roads, it saves money.

"Asphalt, cement, the building materials for these roads, they're just constantly going up. We can't even get an asphalt company to come in here unless it's a really large project 'cause it's just not worth it to them, cause the price of the asphalt has gone up so much," Archuleta said.

He added, "There's your other savings, you're not having to have all this gravel or asphalt brought in from wherever. You might have to bring in some, but the cost is going to be that much less, and plus you're not paying to ship it off somewhere and stick it in the landfill because you're basically recycling it."

Archuleta noted that counties around the Four Corners have used lithification for their roads and that the roads are still holding strong.

"Places in higher elevation where they get a good amount of snow like we get, it's been used there and

[the roads are] holding up," said Archuleta, adding, "They've visited these places where they first put it down, they went back out and these roads are holding up."

Bob Perry, public works director, said that, in September, Pines Drive, Matthews Circle and West Golf Place will be reconstructed using lithification and that the results will dictate if the technology will continue to be used by the county in the future.

Commissioner Ron Maez expressed in a phone call Tuesday that the cost savings plus the strength of the new technology make it an easy decision should September's initial test prove effective.

"You'd be a fool not to do it," Maez said.

Maez also explained that the capital road improvement budget will probably get cut next year to help fund the county's new jail, a move Archuleta anticipates, but is prepared for.

"You know, you gotta do more with less; that's where you get innovative," said Archuleta.