TRANSPORTATION

Reality Check

Myth #3: Road crews just throw some asphalt in potholes to fix them. They need to fix them right the first time so it lasts!

Reality: Pothole patches are just that – a patch. A true fix will require much more.

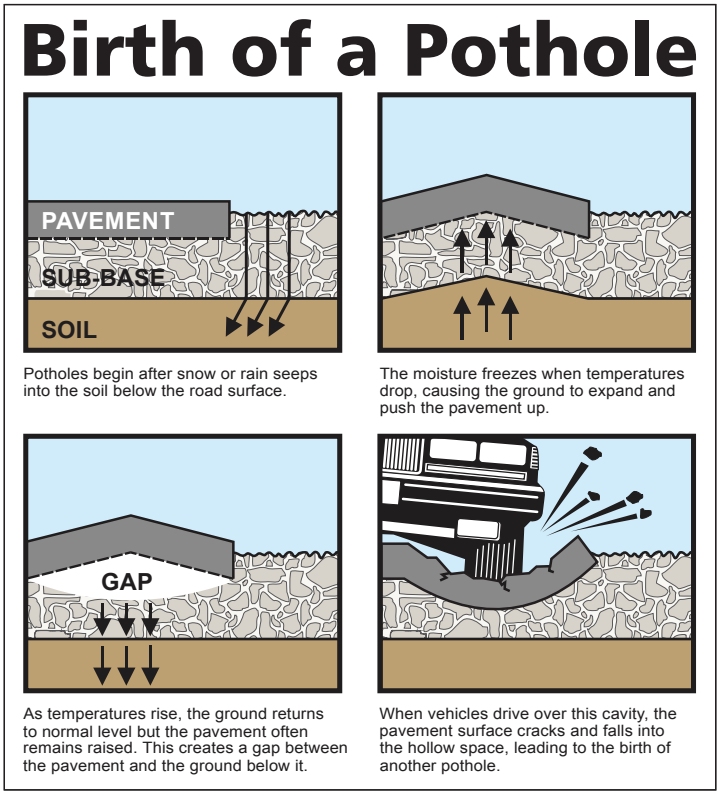
Potholes are frustrating for everyone, drivers and maintenance crews alike. Drivers certainly don't like the damage potholes can do to their cars, and maintenance crews certainly don't relish trying to keep up with the ever-growing number of craters forming in Michigan's roads.

Potholes form when water gets through the road surface into the gravel beneath it. When that water freezes, it expands and pushes the pavement up. When the ground thaws, vehicles push back down, breaking the pavement and forming a pothole. Since thawing and freezing water is the cause of potholes, it's no surprise that most of them appear in the spring.

This particularly hard winter, coupled with an aging road system and a history of underinvestment, is resulting in a record year for potholes in Michigan.

Patching potholes is similar to putting a bandage on a gaping wound – it slows the bleeding, but doesn't repair the damage. Cold-patch asphalt will fill the hole so tires don't plunge into it, but it's not a true repair and does nothing to keep water out.

Potholes are often wet and dirty, and usually are filled with road salt and fragmented pavement. Fixing a pothole to last would involve diverting traffic, squaring up the hole with saws or jackhammers, cleaning out debris, drying the hole, and then filling it with hot-mix asphalt. Because of the sheer number of potholes that need repairs, crews work as fast as they can to shove quality cold-patch into as many holes as they can while minimizing the impact on traffic. It's tough to keep up with potholes using that method; it's impossible to keep up with the more labor-intensive technique.



The best way to prevent potholes is to keep roads in better condition in the first place. That will require far greater investment than we're making today.

For more on this transportation myth, visit www.michigan.gov/realitycheck