THERMOPLASTIC EQUIPMENT FOR FLEET MANAGERS

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GENERAL INTENT

The purpose of this paper is to describe the current methods and possible pitfalls in selecting and bidding thermoplastic equipment for pavement striping. The specification process is, by intent, the most economical approach to purchase. However, your involvement and expertise as purchasers of mechanical equipment is needed to move towards a more productive and durable means of striping roadways.

HISTORY OF THERMOPLASTIC

Thermoplastic has been around for over 40 years and because of its minimal pollutant aspects is becoming more popular as the choice for durable pavement markings. Its longevity has been proven, and its past has only been tarnished by instructions that allowed poor equipment and installation techniques. Since those times, manufacturers have spent a great deal of time and money on improved training techniques, and technical advances in equipment for installation.

HOW DO YOU FIT INTO ALL THIS

Thermoplastic equipment, whether small or large, will probably come under your jurisdiction, whether it is maintaining the units after the purchase or purchasing the trucks used for the larger units. For example, typically the truck for a three melter thermoplastic longliner is a 35,000 GVW truck with a tag axle added. This truck will generally save you as much as $20,000 at the purchase point, due to its single axle. By adding a tag axle, the unit can handle the weight of a double axle, as well as provide greater maneuverability to expend materials by allowing the operator to lift the tag axle from the roadway.

HOW TO PREVENT GOING BACKWARD VS. FORWARD IN THE PURCHASE

As with any machine, thermoplastic equipment is designed to do a job. The best design will provide longevity but that is not always the lowest price bid. The only way to assure a good purchase is to get involved with the smallest details of the equipment. Decide for yourself what physical aspects the equipment must be provided even down to the metal thicknesses. Then, specify it in detail and accept no alternatives. Whenever possible, visit customer references provided by bidders, take photos, ask about levels of service provided *after the sale*. All of these things are difficult to put into a bid, but without an attempt to do so, your entire thermoplastic program could take a major set back.

BEWARE OF THE "NEW GUY WHO SAYS HE CAN BUILD ANYTHING"

Be cautious of bidders who have never or seldom built this equipment. They may be looking at the $200,000 price tags and bidding first, then putting together the specifics of their plan later. One bidder took a bid for two trucks and delivered the first unit over a year later. The first unit was quickly returned for additional work. The bidder appears to have wanted to start the clock on the pursuit of payment in small claims court. In the meantime, the district who purchased the trucks spent all their money on materials to be installed by the new trucks and had no money to even paint their roads with old paint machines. Everyone wants to help someone new get started, and in fact, if the new guy can do the job for less, let him. However, place penalties in your specification for late delivery, poor after the sale follow up and service, poor or no training of your new operators, etc. The greatest machine in the world is only as good as its operator.

Reputable manufacturers realize competition is good, as long as the playing field is level and rules apply equally to all players. Today, there is a need to guard against disreputable bidders who will try anything to grab the buck and leave you standing there trying to figure out what went wrong.