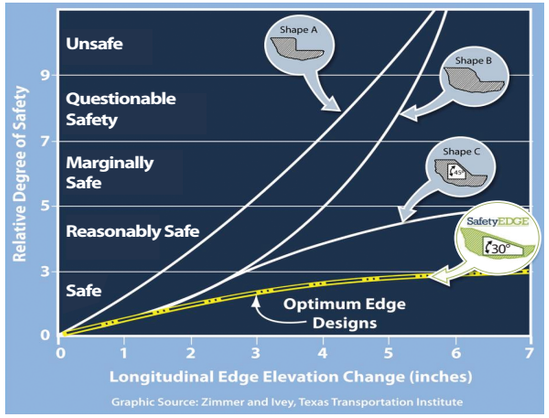
FAQs

Why should I change my current process to include the Safety Edge?

The Safety Edge improves the short- and long-term safety of the roadway. Studies show that severe crashes may occur when a vehicle drops a tire over the edge of a nearly vertical pavement. The research shows that virtually all drivers can recover, even at high speeds, when the pavement edge is a 30-degree wedge. Using the Safety Edge also improves the durability of the pavement edge.

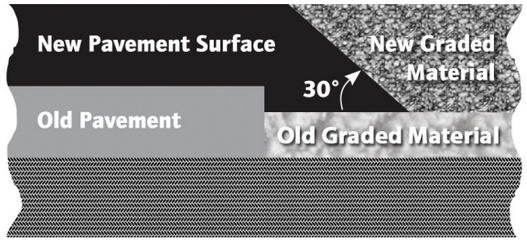


Do I need to modify my paving process to install the Safety Edge on asphalt?

Very few changes are needed. The key item is to add a specially designed shoe, per manufacturer's instructions, to the paver to create the Safety Edge. While paving, the shoe should be monitored and adjusted to keep the bottom edge of the device in contact with the road shoulder surface. Using the Safety Edge should not affect the rate of production.

How much will the addition of the Safety Edge cost per mile?

It will be almost negligible for hot-mix asphalt. It does depend somewhat on the specific design and construction parameters, but typically the process compacts asphalt that often otherwise would break off because it was loose. When measured, it has been calculated to be less than 1 percent additional asphaltic material.



This diagram shows how the Safety Edge is created during a repaving project. As the new graded material begins to settle or erode, the angled and more durable Safety Edge prevents a vertical edge from forming, making the pavement edge safer for drivers and cyclists.

Contact Information

For training or more information on this Every Day Counts Initiative, please contact your local FHWA Division Office.

To learn more about EDC, visit:
http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/everydaycounts

About Every Day Counts

Every Day Counts is designed to identify and deploy innovation aimed at shortening project delivery, enhancing the safety of our roadways, and protecting the environment.

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The Safety Edge

A Pavement Edge Drop-Off Treatment

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

What is the Safety Edge?

The Safety Edge is a simple but effective solution that can help save lives by allowing drivers who drift off highways to return to the road safely. Instead of a vertical drop-off, the Safety Edge shapes the edge of the pavement to 30 degrees. Research has shown this is the optimal angle to allow drivers to re-enter the roadway safely. The asphalt Safety Edge provides a strong, durable transition for all vehicles. Even at higher speeds, vehicles can return to the paved road smoothly and easily. The FHWA's goal is to accelerate the use of the Safety Edge technology, working with States to develop specifications and adopt this pavement edge treatment as a standard practice on all new paving and resurfacing projects.

The Safety Edge is shown here in the main photo during construction. Upon project completion, the adjacent unpaved material should be graded flush with the top of the pavement (inset photo). The Safety Edge creates a more durable pavement edge and makes recovery from any future drop-off much easier and safer.

How Does It Work?

Drivers leave the paved road for many reasons. When steering the tires back onto the pavement, a vertical edge can make it difficult for a driver to safely re-enter the travel lane. Drivers may over-steer and lose control of the vehicle, leading to severe crashes. The challenge is that a drop-off is created during most paving projects. Even when the unpaved shoulder is regraded to eliminate the drop-off, the edge often becomes exposed within a few months. The edge also may deteriorate.

The Safety Edge is an effective solution to reduce pavement edge-related crashes, by shaping the edge of the pavement to 30 degrees using a commercially available device (called a shoe) that can be attached to the paver. The asphalt is extruded under the shoe, resulting in a durable edge that resists edge raveling. Research has shown this 30-degree shape allows drivers to re-enter the roadway safely.

After paving with the Safety Edge, the adjacent material should be regraded flush with the top of the pavement. This is considered the best practice, and provides the safest pavement edge. The difference is that when the edge becomes exposed, this shape can be more safely traversed than a vertical edge.

The shoe that creates the Safety Edge is a special edging device that asphalt paving contractors can install on new or existing resurfacing equipment.

Quick Facts

Sharp, steep pavement edge drop-offs can contribute to crashes.

- The Safety Edge can help decrease highway fatalities and serious injuries on our Nation's highways.
- Because the Safety Edge provides an additional level of consolidation on the edge, edge raveling is decreased. This contributes to longer pavement life.
- The Safety Edge involves minimal time and cost to implement. Typically, less than 1 percent additional asphalt is needed. The Safety Edge shoe, which creates the edge, can be installed on existing equipment.
- The Safety Edge also can be installed on Portland Cement concrete pavements. (Several differences should be considered. For more information, visit the Safety Edge Web site for details.)
- Best practice is to maintain a flush edge, so that no drop-off exists. The Safety Edge reduces the risk of drop-offs when maintenance forces cannot keep up with erosion or tire wear.
- Vertical and near vertical pavement edge drop-offs have been a factor in a substantial percentage of severe crashes in which vehicles leave the road, particularly on rural roads with unpaved shoulders. The Safety Edge reduces this problem, providing a safer transition back to the road.
- The Safety Edge is a safer design for motorcyclists and bicyclists, as well as motorists.

Case Study: Iowa Adopts Safety Edge Policy

Safety Edge treatment being applied during an asphalt overlay.

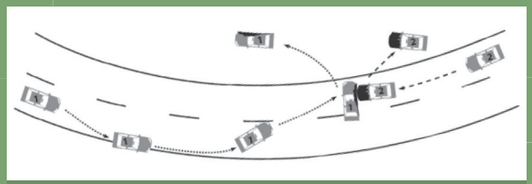
The Iowa FHWA Division and the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) recently began working with counties to install the Safety Edge on projects with a history of roadway departure crashes. The Safety Edge was included at the county level on project plans or incorporated as change orders on already-let projects. During one of these county projects, the contractor's safety officer felt positive about the results because the Safety Edge potentially reduced the contractor's liability by providing immediate elimination of the vertical drop-off.

After seeing how easily even large vehicles could traverse the pavement edge without loss of control or damaging the edge, the county decided its typical practice of bringing in a gravel wedge before nightfall was not necessary when the Safety Edge was present. The results were so positive that IDOT decided to use the Safety Edge on one of its State paving projects on a narrow road. Since then, IDOT has decided to adopt the Safety Edge as standard practice across the entire State.

Pavement Edge Drop-Offs Can Contribute to Crashes

Roadway departures account for 53 percent of fatal crashes. State-level studies point to the life-saving potential of the Safety Edge. For example, researchers studying crashes in Missouri during 2002-2004 reported that pavement edges may have been a contributing factor in as many as 24 percent of rural run-off-road crashes on paved roadways with unpaved shoulders. This type of crash was twice as likely to include a fatality than rural crashes overall on similar roads.[1]

When a driver drifts off the roadway and tries to steer back onto the pavement, a vertical pavement edge can create a "tire scrubbing" condition that may result in over-steering. If drivers over-steer to return to the roadway without reducing speed, they are prone to lose control of the vehicle. The resulting crashes tend to be more severe than other crash types. The vehicle may veer into the adjacent lane, where it may collide with oncoming cars; overturn; or run off the opposite side of the roadway and strike a fixed object or overturn on a slope.



This is a typical diagram for a crash caused by tire scrubbing. The vehicle at left scrubbed the edge of the pavement, and when it returned, the driver overcorrected, lost control, crossed into the adjacent lane, and struck an oncoming vehicle.
(Graphic source: AAA Foundation for Highway Safety)

Inexperienced drivers are not the only victims of tire scrubbing. Smaller, lighter vehicles have a harder time climbing a steep pavement edge. At high speeds, the climb is particularly dangerous. According to in-service evaluations, a vertical or near vertical drop-off of 2.5 inches or greater has been shown to pose a significant risk, while pavements built with the Safety Edge showed reductions of more than 5 percent of total crashes .

[1]Hallmark et. al: Safety Impacts of Pavement Edge Drop-Offs, AAA Foundation for Highway Safety, Washington, DC, September 2006.