

Dust on unsealed roads

Raised dust from unsealed roads can be annoying and inconvenient for affected residents and businesses. This information sheet explains the options and the challenges of reducing dust from unsealed roads.

Why does raised dust occur?

Many factors impact the level of raised dust on an unsealed road. These include weather and climatic conditions, road surface, vehicle speeds and traffic volume. Dust is predominately an issue in the summer months when road surfaces are extremely dry and deteriorate at an increased rate.

What can be done?

The options for reducing raised dust vary in cost and effectiveness:

Sealing unsealed roads – Sealing of unsealed roads is the most effective solution to suppress dust however it is also the most expensive. Council gets many requests each year from residents to have a road sealed. In reviewing and prioritising these requests, consideration is given to:

- Traffic volumes
- Traffic speed
- Number of adjacent/impacted houses
- Road Classification
- Previous complaints history
- Extensive maintenance burden
- Financial cost
- Road safety improvements

In many cases the benefits versus cost to seal a road make it not viable, noting the limited funding available that must be prioritised across various Council programs.

If an unsealed road is deemed viable for reconstruction and sealing, a budget bid must be submitted for both the design and construction. If budget bids are successful, design is typically undertaken in the first year followed by construction in a subsequent year.

Unfortunately, while the most effective solution is to seal the road, budget restrictions limit the likelihood of undertaking these improvements.

Grading roads - Council managed roads are regularly inspected by our Works Unit in accordance with our Road Management Plan. Information is also received from customer requests and/or community feedback.

Our maintenance grading program aims to maintain the condition of unsealed roads to a safe standard that prolongs the life of the road and avoids costly intervention. Additionally, as part of the capital works program, unsealed roads which require a higher level of maintenance are resheeted with a layer of new gravel material to renew the road surface.

Unfortunately, increasing the frequency of grading or resheeting has limited or very short-term benefits in reducing dust.

Reducing speed limits- When vehicles travel at slower speeds usually less dust is generated. However, whether or not a road is sealed does not affect the speed limit. The default speed limit is 100 kilometres per hour in rural areas and 50 kilometres per hour in urban areas.

The introduction of speed limit signage and or associated speed reductions on unsealed roads typically have the opposite effect by encouraging people to drive at or above the limit but not drive to the conditions of the road.

The last point is particularly important with unsealed roads as the condition can vary greatly during the year. Any changes to default or existing speed limits require the approval of the Department of Transport and changes on unsealed roads are typically only supported in very limited circumstances. Dust reduction is generally not considered a valid reason by the Department of Transport for speed limit changes.

If you have concerns about driver behaviour, such as speeding on a particular road, it is best to direct these concerns to the police as they have the ability to conduct routine monitoring and can undertake enforcement actions if appropriate. Castlemaine police station can be contacted via uni-castlemaine@police.vic.gov.au.

Installing dust warning signage – Some residents request signage in the belief that it will slow traffic down. While some signage has been installed in the past, evidence of their effectiveness is limited therefore installation of new signage is typically not supported by Council.

Dust suppressants – Dust suppression chemical treatments can be used to treat problematic areas. The treatment is usually only effective for approximately 3 months and can make the road slippery when it rains.

The high cost of this treatment and short term benefits mean this treatment is only used in very limited circumstances.

What can residents do?

Speak to your neighbours – Residential unsealed roads are often used mostly by those who live there. Residents can work together to decrease dust levels by:

- Keeping your speed down
- Go even slower if it is dusty
- Drive to the conditions of the road
- Increase the distance between you and the vehicle in front
- Avoid hard braking, cornering and accelerating