

Riding India's plastic highway

Too much garbage. Not enough roads. The solution seems obvious.



By **Saritha Rai** - GlobalPost
Published: December 15, 2009 06:39 ET

BANGALORE, India — The roads in booming Bangalore, India's globalization and outsourcing hub, are infamous for potholes and traffic jams.

Now they may become known for a more respectable characteristic. A local entrepreneur duo is helping traffic, and cleaning up the environment, by adding plastic waste to road-laying materials.

The benefits? Plastic roads can better handle the pressure of incessant traffic and, most importantly, the harsh sun, pounding rain and other quirks of Indian weather.

But the plastics approach offers another environmentally friendly benefit.

"It is handy in disposing the tons of waste plastic that Bangalore's residents produce daily," said Ahmed Khan, 61, who with his brother Rasool, 59, is behind the recycling idea.

The plastic project launched by their K.K. Plastic Waste Management company has so far led to 800 miles of sturdy city roads in Bangalore, while ridding the city of 4,000 tons of plastic waste.

That's a very good thing. In India — a country that prides itself on recycling every bit of waste from cloth to paper to metal — plastic trash is fast becoming an environmental nightmare.

Many cities are banning the over-use of plastic bags. Still, plastic waste overflows the country's vast garbage landfills, clogs drainage systems, pollutes rivers and litters world heritage monuments such as the Taj Mahal.

To address that growing problem, the Khans' roads use waste that Bangalore residents discard daily: plastic shopping bags, milk cartons, plastic bottles and the remains of industrial and retail packaging.

0
tweets

Digg

tweet

submit

Share on Facebook

StumbleUpon

Add to Reddit

Print Version

Email Article

Most popular:

[Bank robber hypnotized tellers](#)

[Tiger and Elin Woods' new home: surrounded by ice](#)

[Can Elin go home again?](#)

Bangalore alone generates roughly 40 tons of plastic waste each day, or enough for about 25 miles of road.

So far, the plan seems to be working.

“It adds durability to conventional road asphaltting and rids city landfills of plastic waste,” said V. Ravichandar, a management consultant and an urban governance expert who feels Bangalore is on to a good thing.

To accumulate the plastic, the company works with rag pickers (the Indian term for trash collectors), city authorities and private garbage collection agencies. It pays 12 rupees (about \$0.25) for a kilogram of plastic collected.

<!--pagebreak-->

Prominent Bangalore streets like Millers Road, JC Road, Cunningham Road and Double Road are already using the patented process that mixes shredded plastic waste with asphalt to form a durable material called polymerized bitumen.

Ahmed Khan says the shredded plastic binds the road material, cutting down on the need for constant repair. Since plastic is water resistant, there is less damage during heavy rains which account for the bulk of the damage to roads.

Khan says adding shredded plastic at least doubles the lifespan of non-plastic roads, which typically last three years.

Following its early success, the company is now bidding for plastic road-laying projects in New Delhi and Mumbai. They also say city governments in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nigeria are looking to ride the plastic highway.

Ironically, the Khans first ran a company that produced thousands of bags and other cheap plastic products. They say they saw the folly in their ways by reading and listening to environmentalists.

Call it plastic karma.

Source URL (retrieved on *December 15, 2009 13:14*):
<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/india/091211/plastic-road>