

Innovation Contest At IDOT: Saving Money, Improving Safety

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SPRINGFIELD – An idea to help conserve deicing materials and a tool that assists engineers and designers in improving safety are the winners of the Illinois Department of Transportation’s third annual Innovative Ideas Contest. The contest is a statewide initiative that brings IDOT employees together to share creative solutions to common problems, with the winning ideas selected on their ability to save money and improve safety.

“Our department is as innovative as they come because of employees who show up for work each day with a goal of doing the best job possible every time,” said Acting Illinois Transportation Secretary Omer Osman. “I applaud our employees for their creativity on top of their hard work hard on behalf of the public.”

While the COVID-19 pandemic delayed this year’s contest, typically held in March, it did not diminish its success. Seventy-five ideas were submitted by employees in two tracks: Technical and Operations. Projects were evaluated by size and scope of the problem addressed, creativity in coming up with a solution, ability to be implemented statewide and potential to save time, money or other valuable resources for the state.

The Operations grand champion was the District 6 Carlinville Team Section, with the tank level light. This innovation places sealed LED lights in the lids of tanks that hold deicing chemicals on snowplow trucks. The lights illuminate fluid levels when the tanks are filled at night. This idea has the potential to save thousands of dollars by preventing deicing material spills at minimal expense. The lights cost just \$38 to make from simple parts available at any auto parts store.

For the Technical track, Dixon’s District 2 Bureau of Program Development’s crash analysis tool took top honors. The tool is a program developed using existing software to identify traffic safety problem areas by quickly producing visual representations of potential trends. The program reduces processing time by more than 90% and helps designers make better judgments about how to improve safety.

Twenty-three finalists displayed their work in November through a virtual showcase. To see videos of the ideas in action, visit IDOT’s YouTube account at [youtube.com/user/IllinoisDOT](https://www.youtube.com/user/IllinoisDOT). The videos were filmed before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Illinois.