

Mount Ruthless

As a Connecticut mountain highway undergoes extensive reconstruction, project leaders take water quality precautions

By Caitlin Cunningham

The steep stretch of Rte. 44 that rolls over Avon Mountain and connects the towns of Avon and West Hartford, Conn., has earned a reputation as one of New England's—if not the nation's—most notoriously dangerous commuter routes.

In July 2005, a long-bed dump truck lost control at the foot of the mountain, where Rte. 44 and Rte. 10 intersect, setting off a series of fiery collisions that

improve commuter safety on and around Avon Mountain. She directed the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) to establish a comprehensive safety-improvement task force comprising representatives from the Federal Highway Administration, Capitol Region Council of Governments and its own department. Once formed, the task force suggested various short-term

improvements that have been implemented on the mountain—enlarged signs, resurfacing with high-friction pavement and a remote weather station among them.

In April 2008, under the direction of ConnDOT, Spazzarini Construction Co. Inc., Enfield, Conn., launched major construction activities on Rte. 44. As part of its \$13.2-million contract, Spazzarini will execute some of the task

force's more far-reaching solutions: widening 1.4 miles of road, softening existing curves, building medians and eliminating the need for one of the route's intersections, for example.

The Need for Seed

E.A. Quinn Landscape Contracting Inc., Glastonbury, Conn., bid the hydroseeding and planting portion of the Avon Mountain safety improvement project.

"At the current phase in the project, the main objective is to prevent erosion of the soils from traveling down the swales that were built to prevent clogging of the wetland area," said Joe

Seybold, manager of E.A. Quinn's Hydroseeding Div.

To control erosion during construction, staff stabilized site components over approximately 14 acres, including waste stockpiles that needed to be "locked up" for the Winter 2008 season to protect lower wetlands. Workers applied bare soil, then 4 in. of blown straw. To complete the stabilization process, they used a Finn T330 machine to administer 20 full loads of a blend of 100% wood fiber mix and 80 lb of tackifier.

"The biggest challenge with the project was navigating both equipment and manpower along the work site while traffic remained open during the construction phase—traffic up the mountain is typically bumper to bumper through the construction area," Seybold said.

In Spring 2009, the portion of the site that was stabilized for the winter was scraped off to accommodate for the final grading of the roadway, conducted using a Kobelco SK330LC excavator. **[SWS]**

Caitlin Cunningham is managing editor of Storm Water Solutions. Cunningham can be reached at 847.391.1025 or by e-mail at ccunningham@sgcmail.com.

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Rte. 44 remained open to traffic as workers stabilized soil over approximately 14 acres.

included a bus and several passenger cars. Four people died in the accident, and 19 others suffered injuries.

The intersection made national headlines again in September 2007 when a runaway tractor-trailer barreled into the front of a mountainside shop. The crash—this one nonfatal—evoked a forceful response from fed-up residents and government officials.

"People have had it with wrecks on Avon Mountain," Connecticut Gov. M. Jodi Rell said in a subsequent release.

Mountain Makeover

Gov. Rell immediately ordered a number of actions be taken to