Municipalities across the country are being asked to do more with less. Shrinking budgets are nothing new for municipalities, forcing them to make hard choices when buying equipment. Of course they want to buy the best but don’t always have room for it in the budget. We all know the best is often times not the cheapest and even though they are the cheapest they are rarely the best value. One piece of equipment in particular is often times looked over in a municipal budget and that is the asphalt hotbox reclaimer.

Asphalt hotboxes are a vital piece of equipment in any municipal’s road maintenance fleet because they allow municipalities to buy what they need and use what they buy in regards to hotmix asphalt. When selecting a hotbox, the possibilities are limited but the quality difference in those options are very apparent. One thing to always consider is the steel construction of the hotbox.

Channel steel is always preferable as opposed to tubular steel construction. Tubular steel construction promotes rust from the inside out compromising the structural integrity of the unit. Channel steel is more reliable and allows 100 percent weld coverage in key structural areas resulting in channel steel frames lasting considerably longer than tubular steel frames, according to K-M International.

Another key factor is the location of the burner and other key components. The burner system is the most important part of a hotbox reclaimer and should be properly protected. Some manufacturers locate their burner and key components below the frame, resulting in road grime and debris damaging the burner and its components. So when purchasing a hotbox reclaimer, ensure that the hotbox you are purchasing has its burner and components located above the frame in an enclosed cover. This will save you thousands in maintenance costs in the long run. Do not just look at the purchase costs, ask for a frequent change item list and you will see the upfront savings are later recouped in spare parts.

If you have looked into an asphalt hotbox recently the option of oil jacketed vs air jacketed may have come up. An oil jacketed hotbox means that a layer of oil is placed in between the asphalt compartments inner and outer wall. An air jacketed unit has no oil, it is instead of an insulation material to retain heat throughout the asphalt heating compartment. Although oil jacketed units do work, the costs associated with repairing an oil jacketed unit if punctured is substantial. If built properly an air jacketed system has the better heat transfer ability as an oil jacketed unit to maintain a consistent heat throughout the asphalt compartment, according to K-M.

One major thing to remember when purchasing a hotbox is the unit’s capabilities. A hotbox reclaimer is not an asphalt recycler. Meaning no hotbox on the market regardless of the BTU output, will recycle millings or other junk asphalt material. Don’t be led astray or confused by some industry claims of recycling in a hotbox, it cannot be done. A hotbox is used to maintain HMA at a workable temperature, and reclaiming bulk stored virgin material.

When purchasing a hotbox make sure you do the proper research, because not all hotboxes are created equal. Ensure whatever hotbox you decide to go with will stay on the road being used instead of in the shop being worked on. Always check the manufacturer’s warranty to ensure that they will stand behind their product.

(This story also can be found on Construction Equipment Guide’s Web site at www.constructionequipmentguide.com.)