

Total protection tips

A car park is definitely not just for Christmas – but **Graeme Middleton**, business development manager at car park refurbishment specialist CEMPLAS, shares tips on preparing your facility for the festive season

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The minute the clocks go back at the end of October – the official end of British Summer Time – and the hubbub has died down about having an extra hour in bed, the nation is launched into a blind panic. Why? Well, as central heating systems the length and breadth of the country are turned on for the first time in six months, inevitable failures manifest themselves immediately. People scramble to fix faults, having forgotten to implement service plans.

Unfortunately, the same can happen with car parks, so it's important that your facility is 'winter ready', because it is probably going to be your car park's busiest time of the year, and a time to maximise use and revenue. To help you on your way, I've outlined below some essential winter health-check tips for your car park:

Walk the site: Make sure you walk the site regularly, to check for any problems – and create a Schedule of Defects. Take pictures, make notes and tell those who need to know that you have found problems, so that something can be done about them.

Lighting: A dark and unwelcoming car park is an immediate turn-off for would-be patrons, so make sure your lighting is working properly. Pay particular attention to ensuring that walkways, stairwells and lobbies are well lit, and that missing or broken bulbs and tubes are replaced.

Trip hazards: Obvious trip hazards – such as potholes with steel reinforcement poking out – should be repaired or cordoned off.

Slip hazards: In an ideal world, your parking decks will have a coloured, slip-resistant, waterproof surface.

Even if they don't (yet), removing a buildup of dirt on drive aisles, pedestrian walkways and parking bays will improve their slip resistance. Specific consideration should be given to clearing ice and snow from access stairs and ensuring that there is safe passage for customers in these areas.

Flooding: When was the last time your car park's drains and gullies were emptied to ensure that water can leave as quickly as it arrives? Make sure your drains are free of blockages so that water can easily escape the structure in a controlled way.

No SALT!: It's no secret – salt and steel reinforcement (in concrete) and structural steel members aren't the best of mates. If you spread salt on your car park decks to melt snow – and you don't have any deck waterproofing in place – you are just making a long-term problem even worse. Look to replace your facility's salt bins and their contents with one of the equally effective, but more structure-friendly, de-icing agents that are available.

Keep it clean: Make sure your decks are regularly cleaned (scrubber-vac) with a proprietary floor cleaner that will help to preserve appearance and avoid the buildup of dirt and debris throughout the car park.

Lifecare, lifecare, lifecare!: As part of your car park's Lifecare Plan [see BPA PPN 17 – Asset Management & Maintenance of Parking Structures], it's good practice – once winter is over – to give your car park a thorough inspection. This will help you to identify any defects that have developed over the festive season, and to make a comprehensive plan for relevant remedial measures.