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£5 million wasted on corroding Scots steelwork

James Evison

Work carried out on corroding steelwork could be costing the taxpayer millions a year in unnecessary maintenance costs, according to a survey carried out by a Scottish firm.

The company, Highlands Galvanizing, submitted FOI requests to 32 local authorities in Scotland, asking for information on the annual spending on the upkeep of steelwork.

It discovered 28 local authorities spent £5 million in 2008 on the repair and maintenance of corroding steelwork.

If, as it argues, steelwork had been treated correctly prior to installation, a saving of almost £117 million could be achieved over a 25-year period.

The company admitted the survey did not include associated ancillary costs - such as refurbishment carried out by hired sub-contractors.

On this basis, the figure could be much higher than already predicted, and it claimed the £5 million figure was 'only scratching the surface'.

Some councils have already responded to the issue and begun pre-emptive action to reduce costs.

One such authority is East Lothian Council, addressing wasted maintenance expenditure by refurbishing pedestrian barriers.

David Northcott, senior structures officer at East Lothian Council's transport division, said: "When it comes to exterior steelwork you really can't take any shortcuts.

"If we had opted to simply re-paint the pedestrian barriers they would've started corroding again within a year."

However, the work done so far is minimal compared to that needed to reduce the cost burden.

Paul McCafferty, a director at Highland, questioned the specifying abilities of the councils, saying, "We were shocked at the effect of inadequate specification of local authorities.

"People simply don't realise that if you use the wrong paint or coating on steel, it will not prevent the corrosion process."

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