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Drive along glow-in-the-dark roads

It can be an exhilarating experience for motorists to drive down roads that have good reflectors, at night. Though East Coast Road has had these for several years now, the Chennai Corporation, in a welcome move, has started insisting even newly-laid interior roads get them.

Some of the recently re-laid main roads in Anna Nagar and Nanganallur are proof of this. A senior engineer with the Corporation said they have made it mandatory for road contractors to fit reflectors as they have always been a part of their contract agreement.

In recent times, there have been innovations across the world when it comes to materials that illuminate the road. Eco-friendly 'glow-in-the-dark' roads are being built to serve the multiple purposes of energy conservation, safety and aesthetics. In Netherlands, the government has starting laying a 'smart highway' where the roads are being sprayed with photo-luminescent powder that illuminates the stretch in the night after being 'charged' during sunlight hours.

A UK-based company called 'Pro-teq' has developed a chemical coating, 'Starpath,' that is being deployed in some

parks and public areas there. The chemical coating in 'Starpath' absorbs and stores the energy from ambient light (UV rays) during the day and releases it at night, creating a glowing effect. This eliminates dark corners in public areas, reduces carbon credits by cutting down on streetlight electricity bills and is also touted to be environment friendly.

Outdated facility

Thirty-three in number, the tall red boxes holding phones came handy during times of emergency when East Coast Road to Puducherry became a toll-road facility in March 2002.

When cars met with accidents, frequent at the time of formation of the road due to presence of many curves, people dialled the helpline and an ambulance and patrol vehicle rushed to the spot to help the injured. The vehicle involved in the accident would be moved to the side of the road so as to not impede traffic movement.

Now, 12 years later, the helpline booths are no longer used to make calls to those who man the toll plazas at Uthandi and Hanumanthai. "Everybody has a mobile phone these days, and therefore, the phone booths are redundant," said a source in Tamil Nadu Road Development Company, which manages

and maintains the road.

In the past four years, they have received only four calls and that too, only from children trying to find out what the rusty boxes are for, said a source. Chennai Bypass from Tambaram to Red Hills too used to have such emergency booths but those are now in a decrepit state and nobody maintains them. TNRDC is contemplating the removal of the phones.

(Reporting by Karthik Subramanian and Deepa H. Ramakrishnan)