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PennDOT Wants a Few Good Inventors

If you're a municipal worker who has channeled your inner MacGyver, then the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation wants to hear from you.

PennDOT has opened its annual Build a Better Mousetrap Competition, in search of municipal and road crew workers who have found innovative ways to solve problems. Anyone snickering at the state's effort to inject some friendly competition into the exciting world of municipal maintenance might be interested to know that Lehigh Valley workers have gotten good at winning this thing.

A municipality from the region has won the statewide competition three of the last five years. Whitehall Township won this year for its salt shed curtain that prevents salt piles from washing into local waterways during heavy rains, Upper Nazareth Township won in 2014 for eliminating the need for a trailer by spending just \$40 to build a hitch that easily fastens road saws to municipal vehicles, and Nazareth Borough won in 2013 for building a system to easily spread brine from a pickup truck to prepare for winter storms.

"Our municipal workers are brilliant," Lehigh Valley Planning Commission Senior Planning Technician Brian Hite said. "They're innovative, they're efficient and they figure out how to solve problems without spending a lot of money."

Workers have until March 9 to submit projects they designed or built. In addition to giving some industrious worker statewide bragging rights and a chance to compete in the regional and national competitions, the Build a Better Mousetrap competition serves as a way to share good ideas with other Pennsylvania towns that can apply them.

"It is used to find projects, tools or practices that are innovative or improve the way to do something," said PennDOT spokesman Ron Young. "It can be anything from the development of tools, equipment modifications and/or processes that increase safety, reduce cost, improve efficiency and improve the quality of transportation."

The competition is run by PennDOT's Local Technical Assistance Program. Application forms and more information can be found at PennDOT.