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## I-84 work crews resurface in state

Report: New name but same people, problems

BY MICHAEL PUFFER  
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

**WATERBURY** — The contracting team that badly botched the drainage system under Interstate 84 in Waterbury and Cheshire is back in business under a new name and working on multi-million-dollar state highway projects.

A recently completed state investigation has found similar drainage problems at these other work sites.

In 2002, the state hired North Haven contracting giant L.G. DeFelice to rebuild and widen a 3-mile stretch of Interstate 84 between exits 27 and 25A. The \$65 million project is one stage in a larger effort to widen the highway from Southington to Danbury.

The work was supposed to be complete by October 2005, but DeFelice fell behind schedule, then unexpectedly folded in late spring 2006. Tremendous problems with the drainage system it installed have since come to light, prompting the state to investigate three other ongoing jobs begun by the defunct company.

Two of these — the rebuilding of Route 7 in New Milford and site preparation work for a new interchange of interstates 91 and 95 in New Haven — had restarted under Hallberg  
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## I-84: Fired company reforms, works on Rt. 7, I-95, I-91

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Contracting Corp. The newly formed company is headed by former DeFelice President Stephen Hallberg and began with a staff entirely comprised of former DeFelice employees and executives.

The third project is a reconstruction of an Interstate 95 interchange in West Haven. This job went to O& G Industries of Torrington.

All three projects suffer from extensive drainage problems, according to the reports of the investigating teams.

“A common thread through all three reports is overall poor workmanship with regard to the construction of catch- basins,” wrote the state’s chief highway engineer, Arthur Gruhn, in an Oct. 20 memo summarizing the reports. He also noted the problems noted generally weren’t as severe as those on I-84.

Gruhn cautions that the same DeFelice staff who blundered the I-84 project were “likely” performing the same jobs on the Hallberg projects, and recommends Hallberg be forced to submit a plan “to ensure mistakes are not repeated with its current work.”

The inspection team for the New Haven project witnessed Hallberg staff incorrectly installing at least one drainage basin, according to their report.

Masonry blocks forming the culvert's interior wall were not joined at vertical edges with mortar, although Hallberg's workers attempted to make it look like they had. "...the Contractor took the time to point the vertical joints on the inside faces, thus, if you climbed inside the basin, everything would look fine," state investigators noted.

Stephen Hallberg did not return repeated calls requesting comment.

Despite the findings, DOT Construction Manager Mark Rolfe insists the problems uncovered in New Milford, New Haven and West Haven are less troublesome than those of I-84 for two reasons. First, the roadways have not yet been paved, allowing easy access for repairs. Secondly, the proportion of basins requiring repair or rebuild is far less extensive, he said.

"What made the problems in Waterbury particularly severe was the fact permanent work had been placed on top of unacceptable work," Rolfe said. He said that about 90 percent of the I-84 basins were found to be faulty. But, with the other three projects, "we had nothing even approaching that."

A Sept. 12 report from one inspection team found that 30 of 39 basins reviewed along Route 7 required some sort of repair, and five were not ready for inspection.

## **Big question: Will I-84 have to be torn up again to fix drain**

**BY MICHAEL PUFFER  
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN**

**WATERBURY** — All six lanes of a 3-mile stretch of Interstate 84 in Waterbury and Cheshire opened for the first time last week, four years after a troubled project to widen the highway began.

Motorists will encounter delays next year, however, when a second contractor brought in to finish the job lays a final course of pavement. There also may be further closures if the state finds it has to dig up the road to get at the botched drainage system installed by the original contractor on the project, L.G. DeFelice of North Haven.

Department of Transportation spokesmen repeatedly said that most, if not all, repairs can be done on the road's edge and without the need to close travel lanes. In recent interviews, however, the state's top manager for highway construction, Mark Rolfe, admits there can be no guarantees that workers won't have to tear up lanes to correct some problems.

"Until we have the STV (Inc.) report that tells us how many bad or good things are under the roadway, we can't be certain," Rolfe said, referring to a second study launched into the underground pipes that connect strings of basins before emptying into local water bodies.

STV is the firm the state hired to fully investigate the drainage system earlier this year, as problems began to surface.

The company filed its first draft report in August, detailing widespread issues.

Plans call for 300 drainage basins — boxlike water collectors under grates at the road's edge. Of these, at least 270 need to be repaired or replaced, STV reported. Another 10 were inaccessible due to ongoing construction and 10 more simply could not be found.

After delays that carried the project past its original completion deadline of October 2005, DeFelice abandoned the project in the spring. In June, the North Haven company was then fired from the \$ 65 million contract for not getting back to work. In September, the state also fired the Maguire Group of New Britain from a \$ 5.3 million contract to provide oversight on the project, citing a complete lack of warning on the drainage issue.

STV's investigation continues.

Now, it is looking at the underground network of pipes that connect strings of basins to each other before emptying into local water bodies.

To do this, it is running cameras through thousands of feet of pipe, looking for pipe segments that are cracked, clogged, disconnected or simply missing. This work should wrap up in December, Rolfe said.

The FBI and U.S Department of Transportation are also investigating the project.

On the state level, the attorney general's office and Gov. M Jodi Rell have launched investigations.