

[Back to previous page](#) | [Go to the technology section](#)

Giant gun nails slipping NZ soil

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A machine with origins in chemical warfare is being used to battle slips on New Zealand's roads.

In a case of kiwi ingenuity, the technology behind a weapons launcher has been adapted into a giant nail gun which is so powerful it can stabilise tonnes of soil.

The soil nail launcher uses compressed air to fire a six-metre long steel rod into the ground. The rods stabilise the earth and when placed in rows, stiffen the soil.

Machine manager Lloyd Houghton says the technology was originally developed by the British military to launch nerve gas canisters.

The launcher sends the nail into the earth at a speed of over 320 kilometres an hour and Transit New Zealand says it is faster, cheaper and safer than the traditional ways of fixing slips.

Transit has been using the device to stabilise a slip in Gisborne and spokesman Gordon Hart says they will be looking to use it in different locations.

"We have similar situations in other places like Northland and the Wanganui area where this technology is also being looked at."

The launcher is owned by the contractor who is considering building another one as the work builds up.

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