

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Re: Snow and Ice Control**

The Page County road crew is ready to begin another winter. The Department maintains 102 miles of paved, about 90 miles of seal coat, and 576 miles of aggregate roads, which can be a daunting task during a snowstorm.

The department does take our road clearing responsibilities seriously. We realize that many rural residents work in nearby towns and lost time on the job is a financial hardship to the family. Likewise, we realize that livestock farmers must have access to care for their animals on a regular basis. While less than 25% of the department funding comes from local property taxes, we realize that one of the most visible and time dependent responsibilities of Secondary Roads is snow removal, and we take that responsibility seriously and make it a priority to see to the residents access needs.

Statewide, the extensive rural system can strain local snow and ice budgets - counties are responsible for almost *four times the road miles* of state, city and town agencies *combined*. Last winter the County's snow removal work was 150% more than a normal year. That expense had to be offset in other areas of the budget to accomplish what all concerned believe to be a necessary task – timely snow removal.

The County's snow policy is long established, initially adopted in late December of 1996. In compliance with that policy, most snow clearing is done during the daylight hours. However, crews will start before dawn following a snowstorm to get ahead of traffic and will respond to emergency situations as requested by law enforcement or rescue units. County crews are staffed for one shift of full snow route coverage and do not work in rotating shifts the way that Iowa DOT and many city crews function. Given the size of the rural system and the isolated nature of many roads, the safest and most efficient operation is during the day.

Considering the scope of the job, each storm is evaluated individually as the snowfall and drifting can vary greatly from one side of the County to the other. The paved road system is plowed when one inch or more of snow has fallen and the wind is low enough so that drifting doesn't undo what has been accomplished. The rock road system is plowed when three inches have fallen and the wind is not a serious problem. Service is then provided on a priority basis.

The truck plows first assignment is to open the paved roadways and apply salt and sand to the surface. This application is generally done at intersections, curves and hills, not attempting 100% coverage on County pavements. Salt continues to be the most economical material available to restore safe driving conditions and is particularly effective with air temperatures warmer than twenty-five degrees. The material is never used on aggregate roads since it would melt the base and create a swamp.

The use of salt is limited, however, as increased usage leads to accelerated deterioration of pavements. We strive for a balance between safe and convenient travel versus preserving the County's investment in a long lasting pavement.

In extreme winters, like that experienced in 2009-2010, the crews can work 12 to 16 hour days for a month straight and still have snow clearing work to do. With a fixed staff level, priorities are evaluated often. The first assignment for motorgraders is to generally open the heavier traveled rock roads. Without these roads open, the secondary rock roads would only lead to a snow covered connecting route.

Motorgrader's second priority is to provide access from at least one direction to all residences, followed by establishing two-way traffic on those roads. Finally, the connecting rock roads are cleared to provide more direct travel between destinations. Dirt roads continue to be the lowest priority and are generally not cleared. The County Snow Policy states "Snow will not be removed from roads designated at Level B."

Responses to some commonly asked questions about winter operations on county roads:

### **What has the County done to prepare for winter snow removal?**

In as much as this is an annual process, the County has been fine-tuning its routine winter preparations:

- Road salt was ordered for delivery in June, and delivered in the late summer.
- A contract hauler was hired to haul and stockpile sand for winter road treatments
- After the growing season ended for the vegetation in the right of ways, the shoulders and foreslopes were mowed, first on the pavements then on rock roads, to help reduce drifting of snow in the winter months.
- In early November, all snow removal equipment is installed on the trucks and motorgraders, and tested.
- Also in early November, windrows and loose surface rock was spread over the rock roads to allow it to incorporate into the roadbed prior to freezing. This minimizes the material lost during snow removal efforts.

### **Why does it take so long to clear rock roads?**

Restoring access on rock roads is a slow process since the graders are not built for speed and a typical route covers from sixty to eighty miles of rock roads. Sometimes after a severe storm, it's not possible to reach the remote homes until the second or third day. Home owners are encouraged to plan accordingly for the winter season.

### **Why do they keep plowing my driveway shut?**

Unfortunately, this is due to the continuous operation of the plow. It's necessary for the operator to push without stopping in order to complete the route in a timely manner. If we pause to clear each driveway, both momentum and time are lost.

### **What other issues were notable from the Winter of 2009-2010?**

As some residents ran short of places to store snow from driveways, and others found snow removal challenging, snow was pushed into the road right-of-way and in many cases across the road. This created multiple problems for the County Road system:

- Several rural residents pitched in last winter to clear drifts and open roads. While this sounds helpful to our efforts, it also resulted in lost surfacing material and some unexpected changes in conditions wherever their snow removal efforts ended. Although helpful in extreme cases like last year we discourage such efforts other than where the drive intersects the shoulder of the road.
- Reduction of snow storage in roadside ditches. In severe winters like last year, this can cause major delays in snow removal by the county, as well as lead to

- continued drifting.
- Varying road conditions where snow is pushed across the road. This can lead to unexpected icy patches, drifting, windrows or piles of snow – all potentially serious traffic hazards.

Depositing snow in the right-of-way can be considered a violation of several sections of the state code, and should be avoided if at all possible.

**The plow knocked down my mailbox. Will the County replace it?**

Generally, the County will only replace mailboxes where it can be determined that the equipment made physical contact with the mailbox. During wet snows, the plowing operations will often cast snow across the shoulder, which can break the weaker box supports. The County generally doesn't compensate for that loss.

**I've seen plow trucks on the road that sometimes aren't spreading salt. Why don't they since they're there anyway?**

Salt doesn't melt the ice, but does lower the freezing temperature of water. At critical temperatures, applying salt to roads packed with snow or ice may create worse problems by causing the snow or ice to "glaze" or form a slick shiny surface. Also, during windy storms, snow will often blow off a bare road, whereas salt will sometimes cause the snow to begin to stick. We are careful with our material usage – typically we apply a mixture that is 20 to 25% salt mixed with sand.

**Is there anything that I can do to help with snow and ice operations?**

Yes. Hay bales that are stored along the north or west right-of-way will cause drifting across the roadway. If the bales were set back 300', they would act as a snow fence and actually help protect the road.

Snowfence is always helpful when properly placed. It should be located on the north or west side of the roadway, a minimum of 50 feet back from the right-of-way. Removal of trees and hedges along the north and west sides of roads also helps address drifting concerns.

During severe storms, it's helpful if residents are patient and wait for the plow – abandoned vehicles become a big problem. Our operators try to go around those vehicles. If that's not possible, the vehicle will be moved to allow our equipment to get through. The County will not be liable for damage unless negligence can be established.

**How do we contact your Department?**

Our phone is 712-542-2510 and our regular hours of operation are 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. As long as roadways are passable, we will work regular hours and not work on the weekends. Following a snow storm, we will work overtime during the week and the weekend until access has been restored to homes and livestock.

The County has adopted a Snow Policy that is available to the public at the Secondary Road Department office. The Ordinance limits the County's liability and also outlines services that residents can expect during the winter season.