

ROAD COMMISSION

for OAKLAND COUNTY

PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE

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RCOC PREPARING FOR SNOW BY REVIEWING WINTER OPERATIONS WITH STAFF, HIRING PART-TIME WORKERS TO AUGMENT SNOWPLOW DRIVERS

Beverly Hills, Mich. — The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is in the process of reviewing its winter operations with its truck drivers and mechanics are preparing its winter-maintenance equipment including trucks and plows in anticipation of the inevitable arrival of winter weather.

Again this year, RCOC is hiring part-time, temporary laborers/drivers to augment its full-time staff. “Winter season is a very busy time of year that often requires round-the-clock services to address snow and ice. These part-time workers are a great way to ensure we provide the highest level of service that Oakland County residents deserve,” explained RCOC Chair Andrea LaLonde.

RCOC is also continuing to update its fleet of snowplows/salt trucks. “We continue to replace our aging fleet of trucks,” said RCOC Vice Chair Nancy Quarles. “As a safety feature,” Quarles added, “all new trucks are equipped with green lights that can be seen from a greater distance during winter maintenance. Pick-up trucks used for winter maintenance are also being equipped with the green lights.”

Road Commissioner Eric McPherson noted the agency is prepared for whatever Mother Nature brings during the winter, though a milder winter is always appreciated. “Winter maintenance is one of our most critical functions for the safety of everyone,” he said. “We always prepare for a worse-than-normal winter which includes having plenty of road salt available.”

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LaLonde noted the RCOC team is also constantly looking for best practices when it comes to maintaining roads during the winter months, such as the “wing plows” ordered with new trucks in recent years. “The wing plows extend from the right side of the truck and are retracted when not in use,” LaLonde said.

“They increase the width of roadway plowed by a single truck, enabling trucks to plow a roadway lane and the shoulder at the same time, for example. Equipping many of our trucks with wing plows has improved their efficiency,” she noted.

RCOC also has a winter-weather rapid-response plan that includes pickup trucks to get to isolated icing occurrences and other urgent situations more quickly as well as to get into subdivisions and clear crossovers/turnarounds on boulevards more quickly. Additionally, during or following heavy snow events, RCOC uses non-road-maintenance staff to augment its pool of drivers and hires contractors to help in subdivisions and on back gravel roads in some instances.

Despite the addition of the part-time, temporary employees and the rapid-response plan, LaLonde explained that motorists must still be vigilant when driving during or immediately after snow events. “Drive for the conditions. That will make a safer environment for everyone on the road,” she explained. She also reminded motorists not to crowd the plow and give the plows “room to groom.”

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EDITOR’S NOTE: A fact sheet about RCOC Winter Maintenance operations is attached.

RCOC Winter Maintenance Fact Sheet 2023-2024

Below are some facts and figures related to winter road maintenance in Oakland County.

- Salt trucks and snowplows typically travel more slowly than other traffic. RCOC urges drivers to use caution around the orange trucks and allow them enough room to safely do their jobs: “Don’t crowd the plow.”
- RCOC uses an average of 64,000 tons of salt per winter.
- RCOC salt trucks are kept at six garages located throughout the county. Salt is kept in salt storage facilities at each of those garages. Those facilities, currently nearly full, together hold a total of about 37,500 tons of salt.
- In all, RCOC has jurisdiction over 2,700-plus miles of county roads (including subdivision and gravel roads).
- RCOC also maintains 230 miles of mostly multi-lane state highways on behalf of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). This includes I-75, I-696, I-96, M-59, Telegraph Road and Woodward Ave., among others. These 230 miles of mainly freeway roads are the equivalent of 1,500-plus miles of one-lane pavement.
- RCOC divides all the miles of paved primary roadway it maintains (including county roads and state highways) into 109 “salt routes.” A single “salt run” for a truck typically uses about six tons of salt and takes about two hours.
- RCOC spends approximately \$12 million on winter road maintenance over the course of a winter, including approximately \$5.2 million to maintain the state highways for MDOT.
- RCOC will spend \$52.91 per ton for salt this year, down from the price of \$54.41 paid last year.
- RCOC standards call for approximately 400 pounds of salt to be applied to each two-lane mile of pavement.
- All RCOC salt trucks are equipped with computerized salting mechanisms that automatically adjust the amount of salt spread based on the vehicle’s speed. The salt spreaders also include “pre-wetting” devices that spray salt brine on the salt as it is being spread, so that it begins working more quickly. These technologies also allow RCOC to conserve salt.
- At temperatures below 20 degrees, salt begins to lose its effectiveness. At 10 degrees, it does virtually nothing.
- Salt is still the most cost-effective option for removing ice and maintaining the safest roads possible.
- RCOC keeps salt trucks ready to go 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and has a quick-response team ready to go on short notice.
- RCOC crews maintain state and county roads in Oakland County based on a priority system. “Critical priority” roads are those with more than 10,000 vehicles per day per lane. “Priority 1” roads are those with 2,500 to 10,000 vehicles per day per lane, while priority 2 and 3 roads have less traffic. Priorities can be found on the website: <http://www.rcocweb.org/160/Snow-Plowing>
- RCOC typically does not use sand on paved roads because it does not melt ice and can clog storm drains. Sand is used on gravel roads for traction and where typically there are no storm drains and where salt is less effective.
- A snowstorm that shuts down Michigan’s economy for one day has a \$251 million impact on the state’s economy (Source: the non-profit Salt Institute, Alexandria, VA).
- A single RCOC snowplow/salt truck costs nearly \$400,000 new, a nearly 200 percent cost increase over the last 10 years. The cost for snowplow blades necessary for winter snow and ice removal has risen 100 percent since 2004.
- RCOC has approx. 147 snowplows/salt trucks, though all trucks are never used at the same time (some are “spares,” used when others break down). RCOC also employs 19 “road graders” that are used to plow heavy snow.
- Fully loaded, RCOC snowplows get about 4 miles per gallon of fuel. Empty, they get about 6 miles per gallon.
- RCOC contracts with a number of Oakland County communities to salt and plow some RCOC roads within their boundaries when those communities choose to provide a higher level of service for their residents.

