

# YATES COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

## SNOW & ICE CONTROL POLICY

### ----- TABLE OF CONTENTS -----

1. INTRODUCTION
2. SNOW AND ICE CONTROL GOALS
3. LEVEL OF SERVICE
4. SNOW WATCH
5. EQUIPMENT
6. DISPATCH OF EQUIPMENT
7. MATERIALS AND PLOWING PROCEDURES
8. MAILBOXES AND MAIL DELIVERY
9. DRIVEWAYS
10. DEPOSITING SNOW ON A HIGHWAY
11. LANDSCAPING AND LAWN DAMAGE
12. SERVICE REQUESTS, INQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS
13. EXCEPTIONS
14. HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP
15. WINTER DRIVING TIPS
16. REVIEW OF POLICY

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

This policy is intended to provide the motoring public and emergency service agencies and personnel with general information regarding snow and ice removal operations, level of service, how the public can help and to serve as a guideline and training tool for Highway Department employees.

The Yates County Highway Department is responsible for the maintenance and repair of approximately 180 centerline miles of County roads and 40 bridges throughout the County. The Highway Department has no greater challenge than during the winter snow and ice season when it is charged with attempting to provide passable roads for routine travel and emergency services during and after a snow or ice event. During the winter season, Yates County Highway Department personnel typically plow and maintain about 83 of the approximately 180 miles and contracts with 7 of the 9 Town Highway Departments for the other 97 miles. The Towns of Benton and Jerusalem do not plow for the County.

#### 2. SNOW AND ICE CONTROL GOALS

- Maintain County roads in a passable driving condition for the motoring public in a safe, cost effective manner with motorist safety, Highway Department personnel safety and budget considerations in mind.
- Continually monitor weather and road conditions to enable the Highway Department to determine an effective response to an approaching winter storm event or a storm that has arrived.
- Monitor current and past snow and ice control operations, strategies and costs.
- Educate the public with regard to what levels of service can be expected during and after a storm and how the public can help the Highway Department best perform its snow and ice removal duties.

### **3. LEVEL OF SERVICE**

It is not the policy of the Yates County Highway Department to provide continually bare roads or to provide snow and ice control services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is also not possible to maintain a bare road surface during or immediately following a snow or ice event. Typical hours of operation for snow and ice control operations are 4:30 am to approximately 9:00 pm. Snow and ice control operations will be primarily focused on morning and evening commuter travel times.

During times of severe blizzard, drifting and/or icing conditions, the Highway Superintendent or Deputy Superintendent may opt to keep 1 or 2 trucks on duty after normal hours if it is anticipated that without this extended operation it will be extremely difficult to open or clear certain roads for commuters.

Sections of roadways improved for winter travel may continue to have residual snow and ice in a compacted condition upon them until warmer temperatures or de-icing materials are applied to allow for complete melt-off after a storm. These conditions may be continuous or they may be localized in certain areas of the road depending on temperature, wind velocity, direction and other factors.

### **4. SNOW-WATCH**

Yates County Highway Department assigns “Snow-Watch” duty to two foremen each week who then take turns for 12 hours at a time each day for 1 week then two different foremen are assigned as Snow-Watch for the following week. The “Snow-Watch” is responsible for monitoring weather and road conditions and for initiating and coordinating snow and ice control operations on County roads. Snow-Watch also communicates and coordinates with Town Highway Departments, Yates County Office of Sheriff, the NY State Department of Transportation and various school transportation directors and/or administrators regarding current conditions and ongoing snow and ice control operations.

### **5. EQUIPMENT**

The Yates County Highway Department will acquire, maintain and repair and replace equipment as the annual County Road Machinery budget (as adopted by the YC Legislature) allows. To provide for utilization of equipment in a cost-effective manner, the County may use trucks with plows and sanders, motor graders, front-end loaders or a loader mounted snow blower as necessary for the control of snow and ice on its roads.

The Department also has several trucks including the 1-ton Snow-Watch patrol truck equipped with air and pavement temperature sensing equipment to assist in determining the best course of action for current or anticipated conditions. The Department uses sander controls that are calibrated and tested prior to each snow season. Annual calibration and maintenance of the sander controls is essential to overall cost effective snow and ice control operations. The type of controllers used by Yates County are “ground-speed” controllers that apply salt or sand at a rate relative to the travel speed of the truck. This reduces excessive application of materials during slow travel speeds. Plow truck operators have the capability to increase the pre-set sander application rate for curves and intersections if needed from inside their trucks.

## **6. DISPATCH OF EQUIPMENT**

The start of snow and ice control operations for any snow or ice event is dependent on the immediate and anticipated weather conditions. Upon visual inspection of the existing conditions on various roads and monitoring weather predictions of anticipated conditions, Snow-watch will initiate snow and ice control operations by calling in the necessary personnel and dispatching of equipment as required. The response time will be as soon as possible depending on how fast the existing road conditions allow personnel to report to work. The Superintendent or his designee(s) has the authority to dispatch County equipment to any operator's residence to provide transportation to the operator.

For emergency vehicles responding to emergency situations, necessary equipment and personnel will be dispatched as soon as possible. The request for assistance must be received directly from the Yates County Office of Sheriff or a Fire Department officer at the scene.

## **7. MATERIALS AND PLOWING PROCEDURES**

Yates County Highway Department currently uses straight salt except for extremely cold temperatures (below 15 degrees Fahrenheit) at which time the salt may be pre-wetted with magnesium chloride held in saddle tanks underneath the sander box. A mixture of 50% abrasive sand and 50% rock salt may be also used during very cold temperatures. The magnesium chloride gives the salt a jump start to begin melting snow and ice and it lowers the effective working temperature range of the salt. Sand alone does not have ice-melting capabilities. It is used primarily to provide some limited traction. Salt has an effective working temperature range down to about 15-20 degrees Fahrenheit. Limited or no salting/sanding is done during periods of heavy snowfall and during blowing and drifting conditions because falling or blowing and drifting snow covers the material and it is scraped off on subsequent plowing passes.

Plowing typically ends when the storm ends and roads have been made passable for travel. Drift plowing and pushing back accumulated snow along the roadside will continue after the storm as necessary.

## **8. MAILBOXES AND MAIL DELIVERY**

During and after snow events, highway agencies, in the course of plowing may receive phone calls regarding damage to mailboxes, either from snow plows directly or from the force of snow being thrown by plows. If such damage is indeed caused by snow removal, it is not done intentionally. It is, however, an unfortunate consequence of snow removal. As far as the particular agencies replacing damaged mailboxes, it must be pointed out that there is no statutory or legal authority requiring them to do so. In fact, under Section 319 of the New York State Highway Law, mailboxes are considered highway obstructions and are only "allowed" in the right-of-way as a convenience to the owner as it is understood they are required for mail delivery.

Additionally, an opinion issued by the Attorney General on February 28, 1966 stated, "When the necessity of keeping the highway open conflicts with an individual's reception of the mail, the later must stand aside." Highway crews do their best to avoid mailboxes, but often times visibility, oncoming traffic and heavy snow work against them. The best method to protect your mailbox during the winter months is to ensure it is properly attached to the post and to keep the mailbox assembly simple to limit impact surface area for plowed snow.

Prior to each snow season, the plow truck operators may be assigned to drive their plow routes and make note of those mailboxes that may be a hazard or are already in a state of disrepair, damaged, leaning, etc. for future reference should a complaint be lodged with the Highway Department. Mailboxes that are in a state of disrepair and/or poor condition will be photographed for future reference.

It shall be the policy of the Highway Department to repair or replace only those mailboxes that have been damaged due to direct contact with the plow or wing. Most damage to mailboxes is caused not by direct contact but by the heavy weight of the snow being carried by the plow and deposited along the roadside as the truck moves forward. The sheer weight of the snow is sufficient to cause many mailboxes to become dislodged from the post and may cause posts to be tipped over, bent, or broken off.

If a mailbox and/or post is damaged beyond repair during snow removal operations due to direct contact with the plow or wing, a temporary mailbox will be provided until such time that a permanent replacement can be installed. The Highway Department will replace those damaged mailboxes with a standard size, metal mailbox attached to 4" x 4" post.

Every effort is made by plow operators to remove snow as close to mailboxes as possible to provide access by US Postal Service delivery vehicles. However, it is the responsibility of the resident to provide final cleaning and access to their mailboxes.

## **9. DRIVEWAYS**

During snow removal operations the accumulated windrow of snow being pushed and carried by the plow inevitably gets deposited to the trucks' right side shoulder and/or ditch along its route. Driveways along the route also get filled in. The Highway Department assumes no responsibility for the removal of snow deposited in driveways as a result of normal snow removal operations. The Highway Department can not provide exact times that a certain road will be plowed and it is not possible to change the angle of a one way plow to avoid driveways.

## **10. DEPOSITING SNOW ON A HIGHWAY**

It is illegal to plow, place, push, throw or otherwise deposit or cause to be deposited, any snow or destructive or injurious material or any material which interferes with the safe use of the highway per section 1219 of the New York State Vehicle & Traffic Law.

## **11. LANDSCAPING AND LAWN DAMAGE**

Landscaping and lawns, including but not limited to; shrubs, trees, inanimate objects, etc. installed by a property owner within the ROW will be the responsibility of the owner and the owner assumes all risk of damage to such items. Furthermore, the County cannot reasonably control drift or discharge of snow and/or shoulder materials from the snowplow into roadside ditches and lawns. Unless there is lawn or landscaping damage off the ROW due to direct contact with the plow or wing, the County will not be responsible for the removal/repair of any shoulder materials inadvertently cast into adjacent lawn areas by the plow or wing.

## **12. SERVICE REQUESTS, INQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS**

All requests, inquiries or complaints about snow and ice control service/operations should be directed to the Yates County Highway Department office at (315) 531-3200. Normal office hours during the winter snow and ice season are 7:00 am - 3:30 pm, Monday through Friday. The on-duty Snow-Watch or other Highway Department personnel will respond as soon as feasibly possible.

During any given severe snow or ice event, the Highway Department is extremely busy and committed to clearing the roads as quickly as possible and to the best of their ability for the traveling public. It should be noted that at the start of or during a snow or ice event, Snow-Watch and plow operators will either be enroute or already on duty. During the typical snow and ice control hours of 4:30 am to 9:00 pm, if it is snowing heavily and/or the roads are icing over, the Department is well aware of that fact and is out doing all they can at that particular time. The Highway Department recommends patience and due caution if travel is required.

## **13. EXCEPTIONS**

Each snow or ice event has individual characteristics such as rate of accumulation, temperature, wind velocity and direction, visibility, time of day, etc. associated with it and therefore must be dealt with accordingly. The County Superintendent of Highways and/or his/her designee(s) reserve the right to alter operational strategies, deviate from these standards or terminate ongoing snow and ice control operations at any time, if it is determined that various factors including but not limited to, the need to rest snowplow crews, equipment failure, extreme snowfall accumulation and conditions which make snow and ice control operations unsafe, unnecessary or ineffective.

## **14. HOW THE PUBLIC CAN HELP**

There are several things that motorists and the public can do to help the Highway Department best perform their snow and ice control duties.

- Be patient and be assured that during a snow or ice event every reasonable effort will be made to keep the roads open.
- Be considerate of the snowplow operators.
- Do not attempt to stop a snowplow or obstruct its path. Plow trucks, when loaded with sand and salt weigh approximately 31 tons. That is a lot of weight and responsibility for the driver to deal with and the trucks simply are not as maneuverable and agile as a passenger vehicle. They require extra time and distance to stop or avoid trouble.
- When approaching snow removal equipment from the rear, travel a minimum of 200 feet behind the equipment allowing for sanding and abrupt movements and be patient.
- Use extreme caution when passing snow removal equipment. If you do feel a need to pass, please flash your headlights and/or honk your horn to alert the operator of your intentions.
- Do not park along the roadway during a snow or ice event. Parked vehicles are a hazard not only to the snowplow operators but the travelling public as well. Any cars that are parked along the roadway will be called in to the Yates County Office of Sheriff for removal procedures.
- When clearing driveways put the snow on the “down” side relative to the direction of travel by the snowplow so when the plow blade does deposit its windrow of snow back into the driveway there will be less snow for the homeowner to remove.
- During times of severe storms or blizzard conditions tune to WFLR (95.9 FM, 1570 AM ) or WYLF (850 AM) for information on travel advisories or road closings.

## **15. WINTER DRIVING TIPS**

Winter driving can be very dangerous and requires motorists to be fully alert and aware of their surrounding conditions. There are some things that can be done by motorists to improve their chances for a safe driving experience. Some of the following tips can help.

- Don't drive unless you have to.
- If you must drive, drive defensively, wear your seatbelt, turn your headlights on if conditions warrant their use, be alert and exercise extreme caution. Driving on snow and ice packed roads requires your full attention and demands your best driving skills.
- Be informed of the current and predicted weather conditions for your area and know your employers' inclement weather policy. The fewer cars on the road, the more effective the plowing operations.
- Prepare your vehicle in advance of inclement weather. Regularly check the battery, antifreeze, windshield wipers, heater and defroster. Have at least a half a tank of fuel and have adequate snow tires or chains on your vehicle.
- Clean all snow and ice from your vehicle including all glass areas, headlights and taillights before driving.
- Carry some basic equipment, water and extra clothing in your vehicle in case of an accident, long delay or mechanical problems. Some useful items to have are a flashlight, jumper cables, first aid kit, a hat, gloves, boots, blanket, ice scraper and possibly a small shovel.
- Allow yourself extra distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. This is especially true at intersections where other motorists may be skidding and having difficulty in stopping their vehicle.
- Remember to brake slowly to avoid skidding
- Allow yourself extra time to get to your destination, as you will likely be travelling at a slower speed than normal. This is especially true of vehicles that get caught behind a snowplow.

## **16. REVIEW OF POLICY**

The Highway Department will keep on file comments and complaints regarding this policy. This policy will be reviewed periodically and will consider comments received since the last review.