

PRESS RELEASE 12/21/2010
JACKSON COUNTY SECONDARY ROAD DEPARTMENT

Clark Schloz, Jackson County Engineer



Re: Snow and Ice Control on Jackson County Secondary Roads

The Jackson County road crews are ready to begin another winter. The Department maintains approximately 198 miles of paved and approximately 604 miles of gravel roads, which can be a daunting task during a snowstorm. 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.* This situation was compounded by the passage of Senate File 451 in 2003. This provision of the Iowa Code transferred additional miles of state roads to county jurisdiction. In addition Farm to Market extensions in towns of 500 or less in population were transferred to the county. County Engineer Clark Schloz stated, “We 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. **These folks pay our wages and we want to provide them responsive, efficient service as possible.**” **The Road Department works as hard as it can to provide this important service and stay within budgetary limits. Cooperation and understanding from the public can go a long way towards making the job easier.**

Most snow clearing is done during the daylight hours. However, crews may start as early as 5:00 a. m. following a snowstorm to get ahead of traffic and will respond to emergency situations as requested by law enforcement or rescue units. County crews don't work in rotating shifts the way that state and many city crews function. Engineer Schloz explained that 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. The paved road system is plowed when two inches or more of snow has fallen and the wind is low enough so that drifting doesn't undo what has been accomplished. The gravel road system is plowed when three to four 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. Salt continues to be the most economical material available to restore safe driving conditions and is particularly effective with air temperatures warmer than fifteen degrees. The material is never used on a gravel road since it would melt the base and create a swamp.

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The first assignment for motorgraders is to open the heavier traveled gravel roads. Their 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 gravel roads are cleared to provide more direct travel between destinations. Dirt roads continue to be the lowest priority and often are not cleared if there are no homes or livestock operations that require access. **The Class “B” or Class “C” roads are not cleared of snow or ice.**

Secondary Roads Department responds to some commonly asked questions about winter operations on county roads:

Why does it take so long to clear gravel roads?

Restoring access on gravel roads is a slow process since the graders are not built for speed and a typical route covers from fifty-six to seventy –three centerline miles of road. Sometimes after a severe storm, it’s not possible to reach the remote homes until the second or even third day during severe conditions. **Homeowners and farm operators 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.

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

Generally, the County will replace mailboxes where it can be determined that the County equipment is responsible. This policy is more forgiving than most other counties. In most of the counties mailboxes are only replaced if it can be proved that actual physical contact of the snowplow was made with the mailbox. If the windrow of snow off the plow damages the mailbox, the mailbox is not paid for. In some counties a damaged mailbox is not paid for if hit by the plow or the snow off the plow. If your mailbox is damaged by County snow removal operations contact the Jackson County Board of Supervisor’s Office at 563-652-3181 for further details on how to be reimbursed.

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 1.5% chloride, 35.3% salt mixed with sand.

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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. During severe storms, it's helpful if folks 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 563--652-4782 and our regular hours of operation are 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. As long as roadways are passable and meet the requirements of the County's Snow Ordinance, Ordinance No. 127, we will work regular hours and not work on the weekends. Following a snowstorm, 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 Ordinance, (Ordinance Number 127, Passed 11/25/97), that is available to the public at the Secondary Road Department offices. The Ordinance limits the County's liability and also outlines services that residents can expect during the winter season. The public is encouraged to obtain a copy of the ordinance and become familiar with the provisions of the ordinance.