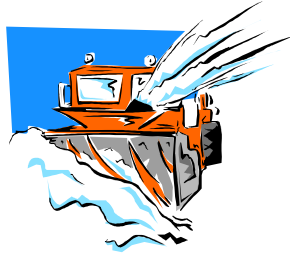


PRESS RELEASE

JACKSON COUNTY SECONDARY ROAD DEPARTMENT

Clark Schloz, Jackson County Engineer



November 3, 2009

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 195 miles of paved and approximately 607 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. Jackson County secondary Roads 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. 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.**

Frequently asked questions about Jackson County winter operations on county roads:

Does Secondary Roads Department pull/tow vehicles out of the roadside ditches?

No, the Secondary Roads Department will not use any of its equipment for the purpose of pulling or towing vehicles out of roadside ditches. The reason for this is Secondary Roads Department may be liable for any damages to the vehicle that may have resulted from the County using its equipment for towing of private vehicles. It is the responsibility of the driver and/or owner of the vehicle to arrange for the towing services.

Does Secondary Roads determine school cancellations or delays?

No, Secondary does not determine school cancellations or delays; this decision is left up to each individual school district. The public is encouraged to contact their local school district for their policy on school cancellations or delays.

Why does it take so long to clear, sand/salt, and/or rock the roads after a storm?

Snow/ice removal is a daunting task, it is not always possible to state a specific time or guarantee a time when a plow will go by or when gravel will be placed on a road. It is unfortunate but it is not possible to be at all the requested locations at the same time or at a requested time of day. Snow/ice operations are not the fastest of maintenance operations and are dependent on many factors such as staff availability, severity/duration of the storm, time between storms, frozen rock piles, mechanical breakdowns, and assisting E911 responders. It may not be possible to clear, sand/salt or gravel every mile of the 802 miles in the Secondary Road System within a 24-hour time frame.

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 snow or ice storm, it's not possible to reach the remote homes until the second or even third day during severe conditions. **Homeowners, farm operators, grain haulers, and semi-tractor trailer operators are encouraged to plan accordingly for the winter season.**

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Does the County spread gravel on the unpaved roads during a snow or ice storm?

The County does not spread additional gravel on the gravel roads during a snow or ice storm. Ordinance No. 127 states that the first priority is the clearing and sanding/salting of the County's hard surfaced roads. It is the county's priority to clear the hard surfaced roads before the trucks move to the gravel roads. The trucks that are used for hard surfaced roads are the same trucks that spread gravel on the gravel roads. The county uses its motorgraders and ice blades to clear ice/snow from the gravel roads. It should be noted that each winter storm is different and the spreading of gravel on gravel roads may not take place until the second or third day of clearing operations and this is dependant on the nature of the storm and the time frame between storms. The County may also have to battle frozen rock piles at the quarries, mechanical breakdowns of equipment, and providing assistance to emergency responders, all of which can slow down the overall snow/ice removal operation.

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. The replacement mailbox and/or post must meet breakaway standards and not be a hazard to the traveling public. The County also reserves the right to review submitted cost and reject any cost that it considers excessive.

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.

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. The other way to help is if you do not have to travel during a storm or on ice/snow covered roads please stay at home. If you absolutely have to travel motorists are reminded to use additional caution and watchfulness, especially in respect to the surface of the roadway or during conditions of reduced visibility and are advised to reduce their speed at least 25 MPH below the legally permitted or advised normal conditions. In respect to roadways that have only one lane open speed should be reduced to 10 MPH. During these conditions no additional warning or regulatory signs will be placed.

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 does not encourage the public to call the individual maintenance shops or maintenance employees. The maintenance crews will be very busy with snow/ice removal and have very little, if any, time for telephone calls. The information the Engineer's Office receives through telephone calls can be better coordinated at the Engineer's Office than through individual shop locations.

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 or may be downloaded on the Jackson County web site <http://www.co.jackson.ia.us/offices/engineer/engineerforms.htm> click on the Ordinance No. 127 to download a copy of the Snow ordinance. 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.

A last minute comment.

The County realizes that snow/ice storms are a major hardship and no one likes them or wishes for them to happen. The County will do the best we can to keep the hardships to a minimum. The County and Secondary Roads Department respectfully ask for the public's cooperation, understanding, and patience in tackling a big job of clearing snow/ice from 802-miles of roads during these hard economic conditions and this time of tightening budgets. Above all Jackson County wishes everybody a safe winter season.