

Snow Plowing

December 2010 has brought significant snow to our area. On Saturday, December 11th we experienced the fifth largest amount of snowfall on record. This blizzard was a challenge for all, including our Public Works Department. Whenever there is a significant amount of snow, the City fields many questions and complaints regarding the process used for snow plowing. Hopefully, I will be able to provide some insight into our procedure.

Generally, the City commences snow and ice control operations when snow accumulations are two inches or more or there are icy conditions and/or drifting snow causing problems for travel. The City has 166 centerline miles of roads to plow which is equivalent to 827 plowing miles; many roads require four passes to clear the two driving lanes and two parking lanes and some wider streets require an additional pass. The equipment the City uses during a snow event could include the following depending on the severity of the storm: 4 road graders, 4 front end loaders, 2 backhoes, 4 tandem trucks with wing plows, 7 single axle trucks with plows and sanders, 3 one-ton trucks with plows, 4 3/4-ton pickups with plows, 3 skid steers and two snow blowers. Snow removal is a critical task and requires use of personnel from not only the Street Department, but also from our Parks and Recreation Department, Wastewater Treatment Plant and Government Buildings Staff. In all, 26 fulltime employees are utilized during a snow event. In addition to City personnel, the City routinely contracts with individual truck drivers to haul snow.

Due to the number of miles and the amount of personnel and equipment needed, the City has identified five priorities for snow removal:

- 1st Priority: Arterial Streets - main roads in and out of the community and emergency access points including the hospital, law enforcement center, fire station and public utilities plant.
- 2nd Priority: Collector Streets - streets that feed into a main arterial street or lead to commercial business districts, centers of major employment, or school sites and portions of the Owatonna Industrial Park.
- 3rd Priority: Residential Streets and Alleys, inclusive of the Cul-de-sacs.
- 4th Priority: Sidewalks adjacent to city owned properties.
- 5th Priority: Trails which are designated as 4-season which provide recreational opportunities during the winter.

A common question received relates to our snow plow scheduling. When the City starts plowing is somewhat dependent on the storm. Most snow removal operations begin at midnight and involve split 12-hour shifts until the City is cleared. For example, City crews worked around the clock for eight days straight after the blizzard on Dec 11, 2010. Depending on the storm conditions, plows may have to temporarily suspend service which also happened on December 11th; visibilities during the height of this storm was near zero and due to concerns regarding public and employee safety, the plows were pulled off of the roads with the

exception of plow assistance for emergency response vehicles. Operations are started at midnight because there are fewer cars parked on the street which allows the plows to clear the streets more efficiently and completely. Please remember the City of Owatonna has a winter parking ordinance that restricts parking from November 15 through March 31, no matter if it snows or not. On even numbered calendar days, vehicles can park on the even side of the street and on odd numbered days, vehicles can park on the odd side of the street. Please help us do our jobs by parking your car in your driveway or on the designated side of the street.

The City uses a specific process for snow removal operations. The City is divided into four plow zones with two trucks, a tandem axle dump truck with a plow and wing, a single axle dump truck with a plow and sander dispatched into each zone. Generally, the same two operators plow a particular zone thus providing them with valuable operational experience from previous snowfalls. Each zone has a specific plow route which maximizes plowing efficiency and follows established priorities. The order of streets plowed in each zone is changed regularly to prevent the same areas from being last each time. Depending on the snow and ice conditions, the operators may plow in tandem with the second truck providing additional ice control. Snowplow operators make every effort to remove snow as close to the curb line as practical; however, it is not possible to provide perfect conditions and eliminate damage to mailboxes with the size and type of equipment the City operates. Therefore, the final cleaning adjacent to mail boxes is the responsibility of each resident.

Certain areas of the City require use of other equipment. Motor graders are used in the downtown area to windrow the snow and load it into trucks with the snow blower. A large amount of snow is hauled away which requires the use of independent contract snow haulers. Other areas including alleys, cul-de-sacs and trails require the use of half-ton and $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton pickups with blades. The City also utilizes sand, salt and chemicals to control snow and ice but their benefits vary under differing conditions. In an average year, the City applies 1,500 pounds of salt and 4,000 ton of sand to the city streets, alleys, parking lots and cul-de-sacs.

Please know clearing our community of snow is a critical operation and City personnel work extremely hard to complete this task as quickly as time and budgetary constraints allow. The complete City Snow and Ice Control Policy is available online on our website at <http://ci.owatonna.mn.us/city/departments/streets>.