

# Snow and Ice Control Policy

The removal of snow and ice from the county's roadways is one of the most important jobs confronting the County Highway Maintenance Department during the winter months. The safety and comfort of the public shall at all times be the primary consideration of all county maintenance personnel. Snow and ice removal operations must be conducted in such a manner so as to provide the safest, most economical means of opening the county's highway system within a reasonable amount of time after each winter storm event.

The following Policy has been established to provide guidelines for the public and for plow operators to follow in order to ensure consistent practices for snow and ice removal during winter storm events.

**Polk County does not have a bare road policy and does not assure a completely bare road.** Entire sections of roadway are not usually salted. Users of the road system are reminded to exercise caution and drive with care. The legal speed limit may not be possible at all times.

## Dispatching of Snow Plows

The decision to plow and/or sand will be made by the Highway Engineer and/or Maintenance Supervisor, based on the following guidelines:

1. The County will not dispatch plows until after the snowfall and/or wind has stopped, EXCEPT: (a) in an emergency or other special circumstances; or (b) when conditions allow reasonable accomplishments to be made.
2. The County will perform snow removal on bituminous surfaced roads when we receive appreciable accumulations, generally 1 to 2 inches. 1" of wet heavy snow or 2" light snow will be used as a general rule of thumb.
3. The County will perform snow removal on gravel roads when accumulations exceed four (4) inches. Gravel roads will not be plowed in early season until snow pack has been formed.
4. The County will perform ice control measures when icy conditions seriously affect travel.

## Hours of Operation

The County is staffed for one shift of snow and ice removal. In a snow event, the necessary County personnel and equipment will be mobilized by the Maintenance Supervisor. Any deviation from the start time must be approved by the Highway Director and/or Maintenance Supervisor.

The normal weekday early start time during a snow event is between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. Weekends and holidays will receive a reduced level of service, due to lower traffic volumes and the limited resources available.

Operator duty shifts are generally limited to a maximum of 12 hours per day for safety reasons; therefore most routes will not have coverage between 5:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. the next morning.

Operations will be halted when: (a) service levels are reached; (b) coverage time has elapsed; (c) conditions are too hazardous; or (d) reasonable accomplishments cannot be made.

## Operations

Generally, the following three phases will be used in snow removal operations:

1. Make the roads passable: Clean one lane in each direction.
2. Widen the lanes to edge of shoulders and apply abrasive/chemical mixture: The County will perform sanding operations at problem areas, including: curves, hills, intersections, and bridges. **The County does not assure a completely bare road and will not typically sand entire sections of highways.**

A blend of 8-10% salt to sand is generally used in sanding operations; this is modified as the temperature and/or conditions warrant. Salt use will be limited at temperatures below +20 degrees; below +20 degrees salt becomes ineffective.

Gravel roads shall not be plowed to a bare surface or sanded unless directed by the Highway Director or Maintenance Supervisor.

3. Clean up: Remove ice and slush off roadway after salt and sun have been allowed to work.

Depending upon the situation, more than one phase may be accomplished at one time.

## Plowing Priorities

It is the goal of the Highway Department to serve the majority of the public in the quickest way possible. Roads with higher traffic volumes will typically receive higher priority. The following are the priorities plow operators will strive to adhere to:

1. County bituminous surfaced roads, starting with high collection areas close to town and working out towards rural areas thereafter.
2. County gravel surfaced roads.
3. Township roads (unorganized town roads and those done on a contract basis)

## Personal Property

Mailboxes, fences and other items damaged during snow and ice removal are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Only those items that were damaged by actual contact with County equipment will be repaired at the County's expense. The Highway Department does not provide special mailbox installations or decorative designs. Damaged supports will be replaced with the Department's swing-away type support. Any mailbox that is repaired or replaced by the Highway Department does not imply a change of ownership.

The County is not liable for damages to fences, vehicles, and/or other objects placed on County right of way.

## **Residential Plowing**

**County residents are reminded that it is unlawful under Minnesota Statutes 160.2715 to plow snow from driveways onto or across County roads.** Piles of snow left on or near the road can freeze into a solid mass or cause drifting, creating a hazardous situation for vehicles and snowplows. Accidents and damages caused by snow piles placed in the roadway may result in liability to the property owner.

## **Stranded Motorists**

Plow operators may assist stranded motorists by contacting local law enforcement and/or emergency personnel. Plow operators will not attempt to remove a stuck vehicle.

## **Emergencies**

The Sheriff's Office should be contacted for all emergencies requiring plowing. Plows will not be dispatched from regular routes or called in for extra duty unless it is an emergency coordinated through the Sheriff's Office. Icing bridges or snow drifting on roads are expected aspects of winter travel and generally is not adequate justification to dispatch plow crews.

## **No Travel Advisory**

No Travel Advisories issued by the State Patrol and/or Sheriff's Office apply to all County snow and ice removal crews. When a No Travel Advisory is issued, local media is contacted and all plows are pulled from their respective routes.

## **Information**

Questions or concerns regarding snow removal should be directed to the Polk County Highway Department at (218)281-3972 during normal business hours (M-F, 7:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.).

## **Summary**

This policy was developed to provide general guidelines for both County personnel and the traveling public. This policy intends to cover the majority of situations normally encountered in winter storm events. If situations arise that is not part of the above policy, the County Highway Engineer or Maintenance Supervisor will deal with them on a case-by-case basis. Each decision to mobilize the snow plow crews is a judgment call based on the particular weather conditions combined with past experience along with the resources available at the time and, therefore, may not adhere strictly to this general policy.

## **Guidelines for Plowing Priorities**

The department should endeavor to have the bituminous routes open within 4 hours and the complete system open within 48 hours. The bituminous routes have been broken down to 3 levels: **Priority**: Extremely high traffic volume areas of high collection. **Primary**: Areas of rural collection, moderate to high volume. **Secondary**: Low traffic count, low volume rural areas.

1. Priority roads: Both lanes should have bare wheel paths with intermittent or completely bare pavement before coverage time is reduced.
2. Primary: Both lanes should have intermittent bare wheel paths with sanded hills, curves, intersections and stop signs.
3. Secondary: One wheel path in each lane should have intermittent bare pavement with sanded hills, curves, intersections and stop signs.
4. Each snowplow route will be reviewed annually and during the season upon the plow operator's request and any necessary changes will be made depending on resources available. Some routes will contain segments that may require additional levels of service.