

ROAD COMMISSION

for OAKLAND COUNTY

PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Oct. 31, 2017

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RCOC PREPARED FOR WINTER: HIRING PART-TIME STAFF TO AUGMENT SNOWPLOW DRIVERS

Beverly Hills, Mich. — The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) is in the process of reviewing its winter operations with its truck drivers and preparing its trucks and plows in anticipation of the inevitable arrival of winter weather.

Again this year, RCOC is hiring part-time, temporary snowplow/salt-truck drivers to augment its full-time staff. The agency plans to hire 35 to 40 temporary drivers.

“The part-time, temporary winter help is a great way to ensure we provide the service that Oakland County residents deserve,” explained RCOC Chairman Eric Wilson. “With the part-time workers, we expect to have approximately 170 snowplow drivers available this winter.”

RCOC is also continuing to update its fleet of snowplows/salt trucks. “We are methodically working toward replacing an aging fleet of trucks,” said RCOC Vice Chairman Greg Jamian. “Nonetheless, we are ready to take on the winter.” He noted RCOC has purchased 47 new snowplow trucks since 2013 and expects to replace 12 more trucks each year going forward.

Road Commissioner Ron Fowkes noted the agency is prepared for whatever Mother Nature brings during the winter, though a milder winter is always appreciated. “The winter snow season historically makes or strains a road commission budget,” Fowkes said. “A lighter winter will definitely help the Road Commission plan for maintenance activities after the winter is over.”

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Wilson noted the RCOC team is constantly looking for best practices when it comes to maintaining roads during the winter months, such as the “wing plows” ordered with new trucks in recent years. The wing plows extend from the right side of the truck and are retracted when not in use. They can expand the width of roadway a single truck can plow, enabling trucks to plow a roadway lane and the shoulder at the same time, for example.

“Equipping many of our trucks with wing plows improves their efficiency,” he pointed out.

RCOC has also introduced a quick-response plan that includes adding light-duty trucks to more quickly get to isolated icing occurrences and other urgent situations as well as to more quickly get into subdivisions and crossovers/turnarounds on boulevards. RCOC has also hired contractors to help out on back roads and in subdivisions during heavy snow events.

Despite the addition of the part-time, temporary employees and the quick-response plan, Jamian explained that motorists must still be vigilant when driving during or immediately after snow events. “Drive for the conditions. That will make a safer environment for everyone on the road.” He also reminded motorists to not crowd the plow and give them room to groom.

Residents with mailboxes along roadsides are reminded to check the stability of boxes. “If your mailbox or post is at all loose, chances are it will not withstand standard snow-removal operations,” RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar said. “Taking time to tighten screws and securing or replacing mail receptacles or posts now will help prevent future mishaps,” Kolar added.

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ATTACHED: RCOC Winter Maintenance Fact Sheet.

RCOC Winter Maintenance Fact Sheet 2016-2017

Below are some facts and figures related to winter road maintenance in Oakland County.

- Salt trucks and snowplows typically travel more slowly than other traffic. RCOC urges drivers to use caution around the orange trucks and allow them enough room to safely do their jobs: “Don’t crowd the plow.”
- RCOC uses an average of 64,000 tons of salt per winter.
- RCOC salt trucks are kept at six garages located throughout the county. Salt is kept in salt storage facilities at each of those garages. Those facilities, currently nearly full, hold a total of about 37,500 tons of salt.
- In all, RCOC has jurisdiction over 2,700-plus miles of county roads (including subdivision and gravel roads).
- RCOC also maintains 230 miles of mostly multi-lane state highways on behalf of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). This includes I-75, I-696, I-96, M-59, Telegraph Road and Woodward Ave., among others. These 230 miles of mainly freeway roads are the equivalent of 1,500-plus miles of one-lane pavement.
- RCOC divides all the miles of paved primary roadway it maintains (including county roads and state highways) into 106 salt “routes.” A single “salt run” for a truck typically uses about 6 tons of salt and takes about two hours.
- RCOC spends approximately \$12 million on winter road maintenance, including approximately \$4.4 million to maintain the state highways for MDOT.
- RCOC will spend \$32 per ton for salt this year, down from the price of \$58 paid last year.
- RCOC standards call for approximately 400 pounds of salt to be applied to each two-lane mile of pavement.
- All RCOC salt trucks are equipped with computerized salting mechanisms that automatically adjust the amount of salt spread based on the vehicle’s speed. The salt spreaders also include “pre-wetting” devices that spray salt brine on the salt as it is being spread, so that it begins working more quickly. These technologies also allow RCOC to conserve salt.
- At temperatures below 20 degrees, salt begins to lose its effectiveness. At 10 degrees, it does virtually nothing.
- Salt is still the most cost-effective option for removing ice and maintaining the safest roads possible.
- RCOC keeps salt trucks ready to go 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and has a quick-response team ready to go on short notice.
- RCOC crews maintain state and county roads in Oakland County based on a priority system. “Critical priority” roads are those with more than 10,000 vehicles per day per lane. “Priority 1” roads are those with 2,500 to 10,000 vehicles per day per lane, while priority 2 and 3 roads have less traffic.
- RCOC typically does not use sand on paved roads because it does not melt ice and can clog storm drains. Sand is used on gravel roads where typically there are no storm drains and where salt is less effective.
- A snowstorm that shuts down Michigan’s economy for one day has a \$251 million impact on the state’s economy (Source: the non-profit Salt Institute, Alexandria, VA).
- A single RCOC snowplow/salt truck costs approximately \$250,000 new, a 100 percent cost increase over the last 10 years. The cost for snowplow blades necessary for winter snow and ice removal has also risen 100 percent since 2004.
- RCOC has approx. 135 snowplows/salt trucks, though all trucks are never used at the same time (some are “spares,” used when others break down). RCOC also employs 19 “road graders” that are used to plow heavy snow.
- Fully loaded, RCOC snowplows get about 4 miles per gallon of fuel. Empty, they get about 6 miles per gallon.
- RCOC contracts with a number of Oakland County communities to salt and plow some RCOC roads within their boundaries when those communities choose to provide their residents a higher level of service.