

RCOC Winter Maintenance Fact Sheet 2025-2026

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, together 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 109 “salt routes.” A single “salt run” for a truck typically uses about six tons of salt and takes about two hours.
- RCOC spends approximately \$12 million on winter road maintenance over the course of a winter, including approximately \$5.2 million to maintain the state highways for MDOT.
- RCOC will spend \$57.78 per ton for salt this year, up from the price of \$55.29 paid last year.
- It can cost RCOC more than \$43,000 per hour to operate at “full-run coverage” (trucks out on all 109 salt runs) during overtime situations.
- 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 to prevent the salt from being scattered off the road and to activate the melting process 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 snow and 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 rapid-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. Priorities can be found on the website: <http://www.rcocweb.org/160/Snow-Plowing>
- 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 for traction and where typically there are no storm drains and where salt is ineffective.
- A single RCOC snowplow/salt truck costs approximately \$425,000 new, a nearly 200 percent cost increase over the last 10 years. The cost for snowplow blades necessary for winter snow and ice removal has risen 100 percent since 2004.
- RCOC has approx. 147 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 a higher level of service for their residents.