

## WHAT CAN YOU DO

While RCOC is doing all it can to improve winter road maintenance in township subdivisions, there are also some things homeowners can do to help RCOC provide the best service possible. These include:

- Remove vehicles from streets during and after snowfalls.
- Be willing to shovel around your mailbox and at the end of your driveway after the RCOC plow comes by. Because of the sheer volume of roads, RCOC trucks cannot plow the ends of driveways or around mailboxes, and, because of the nature of plowing, our trucks will often push snow into driveways or in front of mail boxes (we don't do this intentionally and try to avoid it where possible, but it's inevitable in many cases).
- During or shortly after snowfalls, do not place garbage cans in the road. It is sometimes impossible to plow a subdivision road that is lined with garbage cans.
- Avoid installing in-ground sprinkler heads close to the road. If our driver cannot see where the end of your yard is, he or she may accidentally drive over part of your lawn. When a 14-ton snowplow meets a sprinkler head, the odds don't favor the sprinkler head.
- Before winter starts, check your mailbox post to ensure it is secure. Too often, drivers of the large plow trucks accidentally nudge a mailbox (attempting to plow as close to it as possible), and if the post is not secure, the box will topple over.

## WHAT IS RCOC?

The Road Commission for Oakland County oversees Michigan's largest county road system, with more than 2,700 miles of roads (including more than 750 miles of gravel roads). Only the state highway system is larger.

RCOC also maintains:

- ◆ Approximately 116 bridges,
- ◆ Approximately 1,500 traffic signals,
- ◆ Approximately 100,000 traffic signs and
- ◆ More than 230 miles of state highway.

## SAFETY FIRST

As a matter of policy, major road-improvement projects are conducted by the Road Commission based on a safety ranking system. At RCOC "Safety First" is more than a motto.

## RCOC:

- Is separate from county general government and does not receive any revenue from property taxes.
- Receives the majority of its funding from the state-collected gas tax & vehicle-registration fee.
- Has congested roads due to the tremendous growth in the county.
- Receives no direct revenue from growth and development.
- Pays as much as \$4 million to pave a mile of gravel road.
- Pays \$8 million to widen one mile of road from two lanes to five.
- Is located in a state that had a gas tax below the national average until 2017.
- Is located in a state that ranked in the bottom nine states in state and local road funding for more than 50 years.

## BOARD OF ROAD COMMISSIONERS

**Andrea LaLonde**

**Nancy Quarles**

**Eric McPherson**

**Dennis Kolar, PE**  
*Managing Director*

**Gary Piotrowicz, PE, PTOE**  
*Deputy Managing Director/  
County Highway Engineer*

## RCOC MISSION STATEMENT

RCOC strives to provide the public with leadership in:

- Safe and convenient roads
- Sound financial management
- Responsive and dependable service
- Respect for the environment
- Sensitivity to community concerns

## HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE ROAD COMMISSION?

**CALL, WRITE OR VISIT:**  
DEPARTMENT OF CUSTOMER SERVICES  
2420 PONTIAC LAKE ROAD  
WATERFORD, MI 48328  
**(877) 858-4804 (TOLL-FREE)**  
TDD: (248) 858-8005  
OR, visit RCOC online at  
**[www.rcocweb.org](http://www.rcocweb.org)**

# PLOWING SUBDIVISIONS IN OAKLAND COUNTY



**WHAT HOMEOWNERS SHOULD REALISTICALLY EXPECT DURING WINTER SNOW STORMS**

## PLOWING SUBDIVISION ROADS

The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) prides itself on its ability to promptly plow its roads following a normal snowfall. However, following a major snowstorm (six or more inches of snow in less than 24 hours), subdivision streets in townships may not be plowed for one or more days.

## BACKGROUND

Back when Oakland's townships were largely rural, residents knew they lived "in the county" and expected snow-removal services reflective of their rural environment. Today, however, many of the county's townships are bustling with new subdivisions, shopping centers, schools and business.



As a result, the demand for winter road-maintenance services has increased dramatically. Unfortunately, funding for road maintenance -- which comes primarily from the state gas tax, not your property taxes -- has not kept pace with this growth. That means the expectations of some township residents sometimes exceeds RCOC's ability to provide those services.

## RCOC PRIORITIES

RCOC has approximately 135 salt trucks/snowplows, though no more than 106 are on the road at any given time. Additionally, RCOC has 19 "graders" (large vehicles with a "blade" on the bottom used to smooth gravel roads in the summer) that can be used to plow roads as well during major storms.

However, RCOC is responsible for more than 2,700 miles of roads, which is the largest county road system in Michigan. RCOC also maintains nearly all of the 230 miles (1,500-plus lane miles) of state highways in the county (including I-75, I-696, M-59, Telegraph Road, Woodward Ave., etc).

Additionally, due to funding challenges in past years, RCOC was forced, until recently, to defer the needed replacement of aging equipment. That means some trucks on the road are approaching the end of their useful lives, and so break down much more frequently than they should. This reduces the agency's ability to respond to snow incidents.

RCOC does not now, and probably never will, have enough equipment or manpower to clear all its roads at the same time. In fact, if we invested the amount of money required to acquire the equipment and staff necessary to plow all our roads immediately following a major snow storm, we would not be able to do much of the other necessary road maintenance activities (such as patching potholes, resurfacing pothole-riddled pavement, repairing traffic signals and signs, installing guardrail, grading gravel roads, etc.). Additionally, it would not be fiscally responsible to acquire staff and equipment to be able to respond instantly to the type of snow storm that occurs only occasionally.

That means we must prioritize which roads we plow or salt first.

RCOC, has a formal policy which establishes the priority system for winter road maintenance. The policy indicates that roads will be plowed or salted in the following order:

- ◆ **Critical Priority:** Roads with more than 10,000 vehicles per day per lane or 40,000 vehicles per day total.
- ◆ **Priority I:** Roads with between 2,500 and 10,000 vehicles per day per lane.
- ◆ **Priority II:** Other paved county roads identified on RCOC's "salt route" maps.
- ◆ **Priority III:** Paved roads that do not fall in the above categories, but provide access to hospitals, schools or other significant traffic generators.
- ◆ **Priority IV:** Roads not included in the above categories, but that are "mile-type" local\* roads or "primary"\* gravel roads.
- ◆ **Priority V:** All other roads, including subdivision streets

*\*Note: "Local" and "Primary" are technical definitions that refer to the way a road functions. Primary roads carry traffic across multiple jurisdictions, local roads distribute traffic within a small geographical region, typically within one jurisdiction..*

## SUBDIVISION ROADS

Because of these priorities, RCOC does not plow subdivision streets unless at least four inches of snow have fallen. A variety of factors also affect response time, including temperature, duration of snow fall, time of day and day of the week of the snowfall, etc.

As noted in the priority list on the previous panel, subdivision roads fall at the bottom of the list of priorities. Subdivision roads typically carry less traffic than other roads, and the traffic is typically slower than on major roads. Motorist safety concerns (RCOC's No. 1 priority) dictate that roads with highest traffic volumes and highest speeds are the top priority.

Additionally, since we cannot plow all roads at



the same time, it would not make sense to plow subdivision roads first. If the main roads were not plowed, drivers would not be able to get anywhere.

Also, if emergency vehicles cannot get around on the main roads, it does them no good to be able to drive on the subdivision streets.

## SNOWSTORM REALITY CHECK

The reality is if we have several heavy snowfalls in rapid succession (requiring our trucks to stay on the main roads), it could take four or more days to get into all subdivisions in Oakland County townships.

## WHAT WE'RE DOING TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

RCOC is constantly seeking ways to improve its service and reduce this response time. Several recent advancements should help achieve these goals in coming years.

## HIGH-TECH FLEET MANAGEMENT

RCOC has deployed space-age technology to winter road maintenance to improve agency efficiency and reduce costs.

Through its fleet-management system, RCOC uses global positioning system (GPS) technology to track its trucks. This technology relays to supervisors in real time where every truck is at every moment, and what it is doing and has done (salting, plowing, patrolling for ice, etc.).

This allows the supervisors to more efficiently deploy the trucks and to ensure that roads have not been missed. It also allows them to monitor how frequently a road has been plowed or salted, which helps determine when it will need to be "hit" again.

Additionally, through the fleet-management system, RCOC plow trucks are equipped with sensors that send information back to supervisors at the garages, telling them what the road and air temperatures are (so they know if the road is about to freeze) whether a plow is up or down, the amount of salt the truck is spreading and more.

RCOC was one of the first road agencies in the nation to deploy such a fleet management system for all winter road-maintenance activities.

## CONTRACTORS

During major snow storms, RCOC also hires "contractors" to help plow our roads. They generally are assigned to clear back roads while RCOC crews focus on the busier roads.

## OTHER CHANGES

RCOC is also implementing other changes to ensure our trucks get into subdivisions as quickly as possible. For instance, we have expanded our fleet of pickup trucks with snow plows, which are better able to maneuver the tight turns and cul-de-sacs found in many subdivisions.