

ROAD COMMISSION **for OAKLAND COUNTY**

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RCOC PREPARING FOR SNOW BY REVIEWING WINTER OPERATIONS WITH STAFF, HIRING PART-TIME WORKERS 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 approximately 20 temporary drivers.

“Due to the seasonality of the essential services we provide, these part-time workers are a great way to ensure we provide the service that Oakland County residents deserve,” explained RCOC Chair Andrea LaLonde. “With the part-time workers, we expect to have approximately 180 snowplow drivers available this winter.”

RCOC is also continuing to update its fleet of snowplows/salt trucks. “We are gradually replacing our aging fleet of trucks,” said RCOC Vice Chairman Nancy Quarles. “In fiscal year 22, we will add 24 new snowplow/dump trucks to update our fleet,” she added. “As an additional safety feature, the new trucks are equipped with green lights that can be seen from a greater distance during winter maintenance. Pick-up trucks used for winter maintenance are also being equipped with the green lights.”

Road Commissioner Ron Fowkes noted the agency is prepared for whatever Mother Nature brings during the winter, though a milder winter is always appreciated. “Winter maintenance is one of our most critical functions,” he said. “While we are ready for a worse-than-normal winter, we would welcome a mild season.”

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LaLonde noted the RCOC team is also 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,” LaLonde said.

“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,” she noted.

In recent years, RCOC has also implemented a rapid-response plan that includes pickup trucks to more quickly get to isolated icing occurrences and other urgent situations as well as to more quickly get into subdivisions and clear crossovers/turnarounds on boulevards. Additionally, during or following heavy snow events, RCOC uses non-road-maintenance staff to augment its pool of drivers and hires contractors to help on back roads and in subdivisions.

Despite the addition of the part-time, temporary employees and the rapid-response plan, LaLonde 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,” she explained. She also reminded motorists not to crowd the plow and give the plows “room to groom.”

While RCOC has so far successfully managed the COVID-19 situation, there is always the risk that the pandemic could impact the number of available drivers. “We are working hard to ensure this doesn’t happen,” LaLonde said, “and we have contingency plans should it occur.”

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EDITOR’S NOTE: A fact sheet about RCOC Winter Maintenance operations is attached. Photo of RCOC Managing Director, Dennis Kolar, speaking at the Southfield garage during winter operations review with staff is also attached

RCOC Winter Maintenance Fact Sheet 2021-2022

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 106 “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 \$4.4 million to maintain the state highways for MDOT.
- RCOC will spend \$45.80 per ton for salt this year, up from the price of \$50.72 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. 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 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 \$300,000 new, a 100 percent cost increase over the last 10 years. The cost for snowplow blades necessary for winter snow and ice removal has risen 100 percent since 2004.
- RCOC has approx. 140 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.