

Houston County Department of Transportation

Snow and Ice Control Policy

PREFACE

The following Policy has been established by Houston County to provide guidelines for the public and plow operators to follow in order to ensure consistent practices for snow and ice removal during winter months. Our goal is to have all County highways passable within a reasonable amount of time after a snowfall event has ended. Our plowing priorities reflect a commitment to ensuring that key roads are kept open to serve critical facilities, emergency personnel, and to provide access between State highways and our communities. The Houston County Department of Transportation, like most county highway departments in greater Minnesota, operates under a limited budget with a limited number of snowplows and snowplow operators.

OVERVIEW

Each year as the Minnesota winter approaches, the public's concern about access to work, school, and business increases. The safety and convenience of the traveling public is a primary concern to the Houston County Department of Transportation. The goal of the Department is to have every County maintained roadway passable as soon as reasonably possible after the snowfall event has passed. The Houston County Department of Transportation presently operates with ten primary crews.

The traveling public is reminded to exercise caution and drive with care. Driving the posted speed limit may not be advisable, depending on conditions. The public is also requested NOT TO CROWD THE PLOW. People who drive during the winter season will encounter snow and ice removal equipment. Flashing lights will generally be the first indication of the presence of snow removal equipment. You should reduce speed, pass with care, and keep a safe distance when encountering this equipment.

There are over 520 lane miles within the County road system. At maximum capacity the highway department will have ten plows operating on the County road system. A plow will typically make two passes over a road to provide reasonable driving conditions. The number of lane miles, number of plows and required number of passes will consume an eight-hour day under average snowstorm conditions. Providing the extended snow and ice control coverage on high priority roads always results in overtime. As overtime hours increase, snow plow accident potential and equipment breakdowns due to operator inattentiveness will also increase. Consequently, overtime is minimized to the full extent practical for reasons of safety as well as budgetary reasons.

For snow emergencies occurring outside of the normal work hours, approximately 45 minutes to one hour will lapse between the time that the snow plow operators are called in to the time that the plows arrive on the roads. During this time lapse the operators are reporting to their stations. Sand and deicing chemicals are being mixed proportionately for the storm and temperature conditions.

Deicing salt becomes ineffective as pavement temperatures fall below 15 degrees. For this reason, roads may remain snow packed during cold temperatures. The department will scrape the roads and apply sand for traction. However, bare pavements can not be expected until pavement temperatures rise to or above 15 degrees. Pavement temperatures are normally a few degrees higher than outside air temperatures. Snow packed road conditions can be anticipated when the outside air temperatures are in the single digit to below zero range. The number of days a road will remain snow packed will be determined by the number of days the pavement temperature will exceed 15 degrees and the depth of the snow pack.

GENERAL STANDARDS

The County will dispatch plows, provided it is safe to do so and resources are available, when one or more of the following conditions occur:

- Snow accumulation of two inches or more (lesser amount for wet, heavy snow).
- Drifting snow that interferes with travel.
- Icy conditions that seriously affect travel.

The decision to plow or sand a county road or portion thereof will be made by the Houston County Engineer, or designee. Varying weather conditions, forecasts, operating time and economics play a measurable part in decision making.

Personnel will be assigned for snow plowing during daytime shifts only with a general start time of 4:00 a.m. in the attempt to stay ahead of morning commuters and school bus traffic. All plowing, under normal circumstances, will end no later than 10:00 p.m. on paved roadways and 8:00 p.m. on gravel roadways

Generally, plow operations will consist of three phases: making roads passable, widening and sanding, then general cleaning up.

- Make the roads passable.
Clean one lane in each direction. This usually involves the placement of sand and salt.
- Widen the lanes to edge of shoulders and apply sand/salt mixture.
The County will perform sanding/salting operations at problem areas, including curves, hills, intersections, and bridges. The County does not

assure a completely bare road within a specified timeline due to numerous factors. At no time will the entire roadway be sanded or salted in a snow event.

- Clean up.
Remove ice and slush off roadway after salt and sun have been allowed to work.
Remove snow from urban areas as scheduling/demands allow.

Factors that can delay snow and ice removal include severe cold, strong winds and limited visibility.

Operations will be halted when it is deemed that: desired service levels are reached, coverage time has elapsed, conditions are too hazardous for our operators and the public, or reasonable accomplishments cannot be made.

The higher priority roads will receive higher priority for snow and ice control operations.

Travel advisories issued by the Minnesota State Patrol and/or the Houston County Sheriff will not apply to Houston County snow and ice removal crews.

To facilitate the plowing of County roads, a snow emergency may be declared after a snow fall of two or more inches of snow fall or after an ice storm. All motor vehicles, trailers, or other vehicles shall be removed from all County roads and alleyways within two hours of the event. The emergency will remain in effect for a period of 24 hours or until the roadway is plowed/sanded. For urban streets, that shall mean the entire width from curb to curb. Should a snow/ice event occur between the hours of 10:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M. vehicles should be moved as soon as practicable but no later than 8:00 A.M.

Vehicles parked along roads during snow emergencies hamper the efforts of snow removal operations and can be dangerous to snow plows and other vehicles traveling the road. Snow emergency parking restrictions and authorization for towing is covered under Minnesota Statutes 169, "Traffic Regulations." When parked vehicles are blocking snow removal operations, the highway department may contact the appropriate law enforcement agency and ask that the vehicle be towed. The highway department shall furnish information as to vehicle description, license number and location.

EMERGENCY REQUESTS

The Houston County Sheriff's Office should be contacted for plowing for emergency purposes.

Plows will not be shifted from regular routes unless there is a fire or emergency medical event and the request is made by the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's office will coordinate with the Houston County Department of Transportation for emergency plowing. This

provision is necessary to ensure that other emergency fire, medical, or law enforcement services are present and to improve plowing efficiency.

PERSONAL PROPERTY

Mailboxes damaged during snow removal operations will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Only those mailboxes located and installed in compliance with Minn. Statutes and Rules, and damaged by direct contact with county equipment will be repaired at the County's expense.

Removal of vehicles from ditches or snow banks is the responsibility of the owner. Houston County personnel may assist stranded motorists by contacting law enforcement/emergency personnel. The Highway Department will not attempt to remove stuck vehicles unless directed by law enforcement personnel to eliminate a safety hazard.

RESIDENTIAL PLOWING

Plowing on private property is not allowed.

County removal of the windrow across driveways is not feasible and is the property owner's responsibility.

Pursuant to Minn. Statutes, it is unlawful for snow and ice to be blown or plowed from driveways and deposited onto or across a county road.

SUMMARY OF THE POLICY

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. When certain situations arise that are not part of the above Policy, the County Engineer and his staff will deal with them on a case-by-case basis. Each decision to mobilize the snow plow crew is a judgment call based on the particular weather conditions. Past experience, combined with the resources available at the time, will also be factors in determining when the County operators will be utilized.

The Houston County Department of Transportation continues to review our operations and research new methods to find the most economical ways of providing snow/ice control activities for the taxpayers of Houston County.

Adopted: November 3, 2009