

## FREMONT COUNTY ROAD DEPARTMENT

### Re: Snow and Ice Control

The Fremont County road crew is well into the winter season. The Department maintains 164 miles of hard surfaced roads and 451 miles of gravel roads, which can be a daunting task during a snowstorm. Statewide, the extensive rural system can strain local snow and ice budgets - counties are responsible for almost *four times the road miles* of state, city and town agencies *combined*. County Engineer Dan Davis stated, "We take our road clearing responsibilities seriously. We realize that many rural residents work in nearby towns and lost time on the job is a financial hardship to the family. Likewise, we realize that livestock farmers must have access to care for their animals on a regular basis."

Most snow clearing is done during the daylight hours. However, crews may start before dawn following a snowstorm to get ahead of traffic and will respond to emergency situations as requested by law enforcement or rescue units. County crews don't work in rotating shifts the way that state and many city crews function. Engineer Davis explained that given the size of the rural system and the isolated nature of many roads, the safest and most efficient operation is during the day.

Considering the scope of the job, each storm is evaluated individually. The hard surfaced road system is plowed when snow has fallen and the wind is low enough so that drifting doesn't undo what has been accomplished. The gravel road system is plowed when snow has fallen and the wind is not a serious problem. Service is then provided on a priority basis.

The truck plow operator's first assignment is to open the hard surfaced roadways and apply salt and sand to the surface. Salt continues to be the most economical material available to restore safe driving conditions and is particularly effective with air temperatures warmer than fifteen degrees. The material is never used on a gravel road since it would melt the base and create a swamp.

The first assignment for motor grader operators is to open the heavier traveled gravel roads. Their second priority is to provide access from at least one direction to all residences, followed by establishing two-way traffic on those roads. Finally, the connecting gravel roads are cleared to provide more direct travel between destinations. Dirt roads (135 miles) continue to be the lowest priority and often are not cleared except in an emergency situation.

***Please note:*** *Many citizens have been plowing the gravel roads with tractors, pickups, etc... We realize that your intentions are good, but there are a couple of things you need to consider before you continue this practice.*

- 1. Under Section 319.14 of the Iowa Code, a permit is required for any work done within the public right-of-way. This is not only for safety, but it also allows us some control to make sure that the work does not damage the roadway for the traveling public. This is not intended to mean clearing out individual driveways.*
- 2. When individuals plow gravel roads, they normally push some or all of the rock off of the road and into the ditch. When spring rolls around there will be little or no gravel left on these roads. It takes approximately three years to make a complete cycle to rock all of the roads in the county. If the gravel is bladed off by individuals during the winter, you can see that it will be a long time before new rock may be applied.*

Engineer Davis responded to some commonly asked questions about winter operations on county roads:

#### **Why does it take so long to clear gravel roads?**

Restoring access on gravel roads is a slow process since the graders are not built for speed and a typical route covers approximately ninety miles. The operators must also take care of not removing gravel from the roadway. Sometimes after a severe storm, it's not possible to reach the remote homes until the second or third day. Homeowners are encouraged to plan accordingly for the winter season.

**The plow knocked down my mailbox. Will the County replace it?**

Generally, the County will only replace mailboxes where it can be determined that the equipment made physical contact with the mailbox. During wet snows, the plowing operations will often cast snow across the shoulder, which can break the weaker box supports. The County doesn't compensate for that loss.

**Is there anything that I can do to help with snow and ice operations?**

Yes. Hay bales that are stored along the north or west right-of-way will cause drifting across the roadway. If the bales were set back 300', they would act as a snow fence and actually help protect the road.

During severe storms, it's helpful if folks are patient and wait for the plow – abandoned vehicles become a big problem. Our operators try to go around those vehicles. If that's not possible, the vehicle will be moved to allow our equipment to get through. The County will not be liable for damage unless negligence can be established.

**How do we contact your Department?**

Our phone is 374-2613 and our regular hours of operation are 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. As long as roadways are passable, we will work regular hours and not work on the weekends. Following a snowstorm, we may work some overtime during the week and the weekend until access has been restored to homes and livestock.

The County has adopted a Snow Ordinance that is available to the public at the Road Department office. The Ordinance limits the County's liability and also outlines services that residents can expect during the winter season.