



Questions and Answers about Winter Highway Maintenance in Alberta

When should snowplows be out on the highway?

Alberta standards ensure that snowplows are on a highway when there are three or more centimetres of snow or when it becomes icy. Contractors are expected to provide snow and ice control before traffic is heavy. There are more than 600 snowplows dedicated to our provincial highways. The number of plows on a highway at any given time depends on road conditions and traffic volumes.

Why aren't salt and sand used every time there is ice or snow on a highway?

When the temperature dips below -10 Celsius, salt (sodium chloride) is not very effective. Calcium chloride and magnesium chloride are used in some colder parts of the province as de-icing agents and to freeze-proof sand piles. Sand is primarily used for traction, but in high winds it will blow off the road.

Who is responsible for maintaining our highways during the winter?

Hundreds of people work together to keep Alberta's 32,000 kilometres of highways clear and open to traffic during the winter. Since 1996, private companies have maintained Alberta's primary highways (numbered with one or two digits) and since 2001, they have maintained our three-digit highways as well. The Alberta government's maintenance contract inspectors monitor and regularly review the contractors' work to ensure it's carried out to standards.

Do highway maintenance contractors make a better profit if they leave their snowplows or sanding trucks in the garage more often?

No, in fact just the opposite is true. Alberta's highway maintenance contractors are not paid unless they're out working. They're paid only for the work they do – hourly rates are paid for snowplowing and ice control and contractors are paid by the tonne for the sand and salt they use. Their need to generate revenue motivates them to be out working on our highways. This motivation ensures a high level of service.



Have winter highway maintenance standards slipped since the provincial government privatized these services?

No. In fact, the level of service is continually improving. For example, many of our newer snowplows have side wings and large hoppers for additional plowing and sanding capacities and about half of the fleet has recently been equipped with pre-wetting devices to assist in snow and ice removal. Pre-wetting sprays chemicals on the sand/salt mixture as it is being applied to the road during or after a storm. Another technology that is now in the experimental stage in Alberta is anti-icing, which means spraying a liquid de-icing solution on the road before a storm arrives to prevent ice build-up.

In addition, all snowplows are equipped with Automatic Vehicle Location Systems. These systems use GPS technology to track snowplow movements, which helps government monitor work and audit payments to contractors. The systems also allow automated billing by contractors, which is more efficient and accurate.

Contractors across the province must meet service standards and can be penalized if they don't.

Should we expect maintenance of Alberta highways to be the same during severe storms this winter as it has been in the past?

No, it should be better. Although our province has high maintenance standards, there are always opportunities to do better.

The Alberta government has installed 76 Road Weather Information Systems stations on major Alberta highways, allowing Albertans to better plan trips and road authorities to better plan snow and ice control. Automated weather reporting stations with special sensors embedded in and below the road and on nearby towers collect detailed data on weather conditions at and near the road surface, which can help highway maintenance personnel predict icing conditions and respond more proactively. This information is available at www.ama.ab.ca.

The Alberta government and its partners began Intelligent Transportation Systems research and development projects in the area of road safety. Intelligent Transportation Systems are a broad range of technologies designed to make transportation systems safer, more efficient, more reliable and more environmentally friendly without necessarily having to physically alter existing infrastructure.

However, sometimes Mother Nature gets the upper hand. When severe weather leads to slippery conditions, motorists need to take care and take responsibility.



Has privatization of highway maintenance increased costs to taxpayers?

No. In fact, costs to Alberta taxpayers have been reduced by an average of 25 per cent. The annual savings, which is reinvested in highway infrastructure, is the result of several factors including:

- a co-operative approach with contractors;
- a reduction in “contractor’s risk” resulting from experience and familiarity with the work;
- re-engineering of the maintenance and tendering processes, which allowed contractors greater flexibility in arranging and performing their work while still meeting the desired service levels; and
- the creation of a competitive environment for the contracting industry.

The provincial government also received more than \$46 million from the sale of its highway maintenance equipment (such as snowplow trucks, graders, loaders, tools) and about \$53 million from the sale of its highway maintenance facilities and yards.

How can I get more information about Alberta’s highway maintenance contracts?

A list of current highway maintenance contracts, the *Highway Maintenance Guidelines and Level of Service Manual* and the *Standard Specifications for Highway Maintenance* are publicly available on line at www.transportation.alberta.ca.

The Alberta government also releases information such as the total amount of the highway maintenance contracts, but cannot release confidential commercial information - such as unit prices - because of privacy legislation and the need to uphold the competitive bidding process.

Who should I contact if I’m not satisfied with the way a highway is being maintained during the winter?

If you have any concerns about winter highway maintenance, contact regional Alberta Transportation staff or the highway maintenance contractor in your area.



Highway Maintenance Contractors:

ALBERTA HIGHWAY SERVICES LTD. 1-888-255-5554 (Wetaskiwin, Ponoka, Rocky Mountain House, Caroline, Rimbey, Red Deer, Lacombe, Innisfail, Airdrie, Olds, Edmonton, Leduc, Fort Saskatchewan, Stony Plain, Drayton Valley, Morinville, Slave Lake, High Prairie, Swan Hills, Barrhead, Westlock and Athabasca)

CARILLION CANADA INC. 1-800-390-2242 (Fort McMurray, Boyle, Smoky Lake, Cold Lake, St. Paul, Lac La Biche, Vegreville, Tofield, Lamont, Lloydminster, Wainwright, Vermilion, Camrose, Viking and Killam)

CARMACKS ENTERPRISES LTD. 1-800-621-5386 (Deerfoot Trail in Calgary)

LAPRAIRIE GROUP CONTRACTORS (ALBERTA) LTD. 1-866-532-8555 (High Level, Manning, Peace River, Valleyview and Fox Creek)

LEDCOR ALBERTA LIMITED 1-866-453-3267 (Grande Prairie, Hinton, Edson, Whitecourt, Stettler, Three Hills, Drumheller, Hanna, Coronation, Provost and Oyen)

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT (780) 466-5084 (Anthony Henday Drive in Edmonton)

VOLKER STEVIN CONTRACTING LTD. 1-888-877-6237 (Lethbridge, Fort Macleod, Pincher Creek, Claresholm, Cardston, Taber, Brooks, Medicine Hat, Calgary, High River, Okotoks, Turner Valley, Canmore, Strathmore and Bassano)

Regional Alberta Transportation staff:

To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000

Calgary District (403) 297-6311

Athabasca District (780) 675-2624

Lethbridge District (403) 382-4071

Edson District (780) 723-8250

Red Deer District (403) 340-4964

Stony Plain District (780) 963-5711

Hanna District (403) 854-5550

Grande Prairie District (780) 538-6113

Vermilion District (780) 853-8182

Peace River District (780) 624-6220