

How does the City prepare for winter weather events?

Planning starts well before the first snowflake falls. In early November, the Public Works Department holds its annual Snow Equipment Inspection Day which includes inspection and inventory of equipment (trucks with plows and salt/sand spreaders as well as other auxiliary equipment) and supplies (stockpile of salt/sand and brine solution), in addition to personnel readiness training.

What is the City's snow and ice removal plan?

When snow is in the forecast, the pre-treatment strategy is determined based on the forecast. If the event starts with dry conditions, certain roads and bridges may be pre-treated with brine solution (liquid salt). If the event starts with rain, such pre-treatment is ineffective and the operation begins with spreading salt/sand mixture on emergency routes and then branching off to other roads. The plowing operation typically begins when accumulation approaches 2" of snow.

What roads does the City clear?

There are more than 2,300 lane miles of roadway in Chesapeake. Due to limited resources, not every road will be treated. Roads are classified into a hierarchy and treated in the following order:

Emergency Routes: These roads connect traffic flow to hospitals, interstates, and the neighboring cities, as well as providing essential north/south and east/west corridors across the City.

Primary Routes: These are high-volume roads serving as significant travel ways and collection systems to the Emergency Routes.

Secondary Routes: These are moderate-to-lower traffic corridors that channel traffic from neighborhoods to primary roads, or provide useful connections for travel and services.

Maps of these classifications can be found on the City's website at www.CityofChesapeake.net/PublicWorks on the Weather Emergencies snow page.

It is important to note that the snow response plan does not include plowing or spreading on neighborhood streets, due to limited resources, as well as geometric constraints (e.g. narrow streets and on-street parking). The goal is to clear, and keep clear, Emergency Routes within 24-36 hours of the start of snow fall, before branching out to Primary and then Secondary Routes.

Why won't the City clear neighborhood streets?

The snow clearing prioritization maps were developed to optimize the use of available resources in response to emergencies. The traffic volumes and connectivity to interstates, medical centers and neighboring gateways determine the road hierarchy. Residential streets channel low volume neighborhood traffic to Secondary roads which in turn connect to higher volume Primary roads. Primary roads serve as the main arteries to Emergency routes. The goal is to clear Emergency roads in 24-36 hours depending on snow accumulation and then to work down to clear Primary and then Secondary roads. Due to limited resources and the number of lane miles in the City, it would typically take days to reach residential streets. Additionally, narrow residential streets coupled with parked cars create challenging plow conditions. It would take at least 50 more trucks and additional personnel and training to do residential streets.

Why don't we have a policy of plowing out school lots (and for that matter as many side roads as possible) to reduce impact of snow to school schedules?

Chesapeake Public Schools has a contract in place to clear 45 bus ramps at their school buildings. Their challenge when determining school re-openings is the condition of residential streets and how that may impact the safety of children and buses.

Who is responsible for clearing my sidewalk and driveway?

The City does not clear snow from driveways or neighborhood sidewalks.

What is black ice and how can I identify it?

Black ice is a transparent film of ice that reflects the color of asphalt (black top). Black ice is formed when the outside temperature is warmer than the road surface. Any moisture freezes immediately when it comes in contact with the road surface. Since it is very hard to detect, motorists must use caution driving on bridges and overpasses when conditions are ripe for black ice. It is best to assume that all road surfaces are icy, and to drive with appropriate caution.

Can the snowplows avoid creating snow drifts that hinder access to/from my neighborhood?

It is difficult for the snow plows servicing a route to prevent the formation of "wind rows" of snow at intersections, turn lanes, median breaks, and other similar places. However, the snow response fleet also includes some smaller vehicles equipped with plows that are meant to go behind the full-size plows to help remove some of these buildups. Citizens are encouraged to call in observations of snow drifts reducing access or visibility to untreated streets to the Police Department non-emergency line, 382-6161. The Public Works Department will make every effort to inspect and address confirmed obstructions as soon as is practical.

Why do trucks sometimes drive with plows in an up position?

There are several reasons why a truck may be travelling with the plow up. Foremost is the fact that plowing does not become effective until a certain level of accumulation has taken effect, generally on the order of 2 inches. Driving with the plow down with insufficient snow on the surface causes tremendous and unnecessary wear on the equipment as well as the road surface and can be dangerous. The vehicle may also be experiencing mechanical difficulty with the equipment. Unfortunately snow response is extremely hard on equipment and mechanical breakdowns are not uncommon.

Is the material you use to treat streets hazardous to my car or to the environment?

The City uses a mixture of mostly salt with some sand when treating roadways. While this is not hazardous to vehicles, it is generally suggested that any residue be washed off as soon as safely possible following a snow or ice event, to prevent lingering damage to paint and other surfaces. The materials are organic and the natural mixing with water (snow/ice) helps to dissolve them. We use as little material as possible and are using more salt than sand to lessen the amount of sediment that gets washed into our waterways. We also use our street sweeper fleet after winter weather events to help clean up leftover sand that may still be on the road.



Snow & Ice Removal Plan

Frequently Asked Questions

Why does the City not have more plows/trucks available for snow clearance?

The City works to balance demand for services with available budget. As a southeastern Virginia municipality, Chesapeake generally sees only a few winter weather events each year. In order to be responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, we make use of all resources available and fund a snow response plan appropriate for the types of events we most often see.

How can I help?

There are several ways you can help City snow response staff do their jobs safely and effectively. First, do not drive in these conditions unless absolutely necessary. Those that must drive should keep a very safe distance from any snow equipment they see. It is very difficult for the drivers of these vehicles to see you, and they are also concentrating very heavily on the multiple complex components of plowing and spreading. Snow plows/spreaders may need to change speeds or change lanes or make otherwise unusual and unpredictable movements at any time. Never under any circumstances should you attempt to get around a snow plow or a formation of snow plows. It is a tremendous help to be patient and supportive of your City snow responders and Emergency Services; - they work hard for you until things are back to normal, and beyond! Lastly, you may report any potential road hazards to 382-CITY(2489).

Who should I call during an emergency?

If you have an emergency, call 911. For non-emergencies, call the non-emergency police line 382-6161. When the City is open for business, service requests can be called in to the Customer Contact Center at 382-CITY (2489).