

Opinion: Preparing for winter road conditions

By Meg Ragonese

As continuing rain and potential snow is forecast Northern Nevada, the Nevada Department of Transportation is prepared to help keep roads clear.

NDOT begins annual winter preparations in August by readying more than 80 snowplows and other pieces of snow and ice equipment for use in snow removal across northwestern Nevada. More than 32,000 thousand cubic yards of salt and sand has been stockpiled in the area, ready to be spread on winter roads for increased traction and safety. The sand is combined with salt and wetted with brine to create more dense sand that keeps roads ice-free at lower temperatures and will not as easily bounce off roadway surfaces. NDOT sand trucks calibrate the amount of salt and sand, spreading the mixture on roadways with extreme precision and efficiency.

“Drivers will also see our NDOT vehicles spraying a liquid brine on the roads prior to certain snow storms,” NDOT Assistant District Engineer for Maintenance Mike Fuess explained. “The brine is a water solution of 23 percent salt that we produce in-house at a substantial cost savings. Sprayed in certain conditions before storms, the brine helps reduce how quickly the ice forms and sticks to the road.”

NDOT has approximately 150 permanent maintenance staff in northwestern Nevada. As storms move in, maintenance personnel closely monitor professional meteorological forecasts detailing wind, rain, snow, ice and other weather on state roads. Staff also utilize more than 30 Road Weather Information System meteorological stations located along northwestern Nevada roadways to provide detailed reports of

current air and pavement temperature, as well as any moisture. The updated weather readings help pinpoint precise sections of roads needing brine, salt and sand or snow removal.

During major winter storms, crews work in 12 hour shifts, rotating personnel to provide 24 hour-a-day snow removal.

NDOT has installed automatic anti-icing systems on four bridges on Interstate 580 between Reno and Carson City to help delay and prevent ice formation on bridge surfaces. When potentially freezing conditions set in, pavement sensors on each bridge activate spray disks embedded within the concrete. Each recessed disk sprays a potassium acetate anti-icing solution to help delay formation of ice.

NDOT will also use tow plows on I-580 between south Reno and north Carson and other areas. The tow plow is a second, steerable snowplow blade towed like a trailer behind a traditional snowplow. The tow plow swings out to the lane next to the lead snowplow to clear a second lane of snow.

On average, more than 2,000 crashes occur statewide every year due to unsafe driving in snow, ice and other wet conditions, such as driving too fast for conditions, following too closely, or failing to maintain a lane and overcorrecting. In winter weather, motorists are reminded to drive slowly for conditions and leave space between their vehicle and others. Wearing a seat belt and focusing on the road are other important driving tips for any type of weather.

Driving tips:

- Remove snow and ice from all vehicle windows, mirrors and lights prior to driving
- Only travel in winter weather when absolutely necessary, and leave early to provide enough time to safely reach your destination

- Slow down on winter roads; speed limits are based on road and weather conditions
- Keep a safe distance from other vehicles
- Watch carefully for snow removal equipment
- Use extra caution on bridges and ramps, as they may be icy

Check before you go:

Tires, brakes, lights, battery, wipers, defroster, heater, and vehicle fluid levels.

Carry with you:

Tire chains, flashlight, ice scraper, snow shovel, first aid supplies, extra clothes/gloves, blanket, flares, non-perishable food/water.

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