

Snow and ice removal on Clark County roads

Frequently asked questions

Where are the snowplows?

Currently, we can't provide the location of snowplows throughout the day. Public Works intends to request future funding for GPS technology that would allow us to share real-time tracking information online.

Will streets be plowed to bare pavement in heavy snow?

No. Our plows cannot apply heavy down pressure, besides the weight of the blade itself, and therefore cannot scrape down to pavement through thick ice or heavy snow, particularly when it's been compacted by traffic.

Why doesn't the county buy more equipment?

Unlike other parts of the nation, a major snowstorm typically hits our area only every five years or so. It wouldn't be financially responsible for the county to purchase and maintain a fleet of snowplows it uses so infrequently.

What does the county use to de-ice the roads?

Salt brine is used to remove snow and ice. Salt brine is about one-fourth the cost of magnesium chloride but just as effective in removing snow and ice.

According to the Washington State Department of Transportation, which has been using salt brine since the early 1990s, the anti-icer meets Pacific Northwest Snowfighters Association's specifications for safety, environmental preservation, infrastructure protection, cost-effectiveness and performance.

What is salt brine?

Salt brine is merely a mix of water and salt. The solution is 23.3 percent salt, the most water can absorb.

How does salt brine work?

Salt brine can effectively pretreat roads before a storm arrives, as well as help remove snow and ice during and after a storm. The salt interferes with snow and ice crystals and helps prevent them from binding to the roadway. When applied to compacted snow and ice, it can help melt and break up the surface so it can be cleared by snowplows.

If the temperature drops below 20 degrees, 5 percent calcium chloride is added to the solution to increase the melting power of the salt.

Is salt corrosive to my car?

Salt is corrosive, but the solution's effect on cars is minimal because the county has mild winters. Rain that often follows snow and ice quickly washes salt from roads. All the same, you might want to wash your vehicle following a snowstorm to reduce the corrosive effect on exposed steel.

What are the environmental impacts of using salt brine?

Because the amount of salt brine used during the winter is relatively small, there is minimal environmental impact on streams and rivers. A Washington State Department of Washington study along SR 97 in Chelan County, from December 1999 to May 2000, found no measurable negative impact on Peshastin Creek, which is home to three threatened or endangered species: steelhead, Chinook salmon and bull trout.

What about the sand and gravel?

We use sanding rock on some hills, curves and other trouble spots, but not on busy roads. In heavy traffic, sanding rock is quickly thrown to the side and must be swept up during post-storm cleanup. It also can clog drainage systems and harm aquatic life if washed into waterways. The cost of applying sanding rock is an expensive alternative at about \$93 per lane mile, including post-storm street sweeping, compared with \$5 per lane mile for salt brine.

