



Questions & Answers: Snow Removal

Wicomico County Department of Public Works, Roads Division
Hours of Operation: 7:00am – 3:30pm, Monday – Friday
Information: 410-548-4872



1. Why do the plows block my driveway with snow?

The primary goal of plowing is to remove snow from streets so that the road is open to vehicular traffic. Plowing pushes snow to the side from the middle of the street naturally, and, unfortunately, this results in snow piling up in front of driveways. Snowplows typically push snow to the right of the travel lane and the driver has no control over this. Also, the driver cannot stop or raise the plow at each driveway as this would leave a pile of snow

in the roadway. Residents are advised to wait until the plow has been through their road prior to cleaning their driveway and mailbox area. If drifting or more snow occurs the plows may have to make multiple passes on a road at a later time to keep the road clear. If possible, plow drivers will try to prevent excessive blockages at driveways but at times this is not possible. Please remember that the clearing of driveway and mailbox areas is the responsibility of the resident.

2. Why don't the snow plows chop off the ice?

Snowplows do not have hydraulic down pressure that would be required to “cut” ice. Plows work only by the weight of the plow, which is then transferred to the blade and this will not cut packed ice. Once traffic packs the snow, the blade will only remove the loose snow from the road.

3. I live in a development. Why don't the trucks come to my area right away?

During a “normal” snow event (2in. - 4in.), Wicomico County Department of Public Works (DPW) has snowplows in all areas (including subdivisions) at the same time main roads are being plowed. Wicomico County has 700 miles of road to clear and each plow driver has an assigned section which will take twelve to fourteen hours to clear. Therefore, it depends on where within the assigned section a resident lives as to how soon a plow gets to the area.



During an extreme event, roads are cleared on a priority basis: (1) Major Collector roads (2) Minor Collector roads (3) Rural Roads (4) Subdivision Streets (5) Dirt Roads.

Another major consideration for judging response time during an extreme event, is the number of workers available and the equipment on hand to complete the task. In the recent past, the county had about 78 DPW employees on hand for a major snow event. Due to major State and smaller local budget cuts, that number is now 43. The county has 44 pieces of equipment available. Please be aware that, while the snow falls all at once, county road crews clear the 700 miles of roads one mile at a time.

Solid Waste Division employees join the Roads' crews during a major event. Therefore, convenience centers (formerly known as transfer stations) are closed during major snow events.

4. How much snow do we have to have before the county starts plowing?

Generally, DPW does not send out crews until 2-3 inches have fallen. Salt trucks, however, may be on collector roads before that. Another question may be, **"When does the county stop plowing?"** The answer is, **"Not until the roads are clear."** During the 2010 major snow event the workers were housed at the Roads facility and many did not have a day off for weeks.

5. Does the county salt the roads before plowing them?

DPW applies salt only to major & minor collector roads. Depending on the severity of the storm, roads are sometimes plowed prior to salting. Normally, roads are salted and the salt is left for a time to "work" prior to the road being plowed. Wicomico County does not salt rural roads, subdivision streets or dirt roads.

6. Who pays if the county knocks over my mailbox or damages my property?

The County will replace mailboxes damaged by snowplows with a standard black or white mailbox and a 4x4 wooden post. The County will repair "plowed" yard areas as time and weather permits. Residents are to be advised that any items placed within the road right of way are placed at the resident's own risk. Many residents, especially those residing on curved roads, have placed temporary markers along their properties. This is very helpful to DPW and others are encouraged to do this. Please report damage to DPW-Roads Division at 410-548-4872.

7. How difficult is it to plow snow drifts?

Very! Drifting is a factor that makes it extremely difficult to clear roads. County DPW crews often clear a road only to find that, within hours, drifting has covered it again. In 2010, crews



encountered drifts as high as 10' on some country roads. The County has three "V" plows that are mounted on road graders and can move very large drifts. Despite this, drifting was so bad on one road in 2010 that the DPW had to clear it with an excavator.

8. What kind of a schedule does the DPW maintain in a snow emergency?

The Roads and Solid Waste Divisions are on duty and on call during a snow emergency. This status doesn't change until the county roads are clear.

As mentioned above, Wicomico County Roads Division and Wicomico County Solid Waste Division combine resources to plow snow during a snow emergency. The DPW will work around the clock until all roads have been opened. Depending on the storm, most employees are allowed time to rest once the roads are opened. If required, some personnel will remain on duty to maintain drift and problem areas.

9. What do I do if I have an emergency during a major snow event?

If residents have an emergency during a storm they should contact 911. The Wicomico County Department of Emergency Services is on full alert during these times.

10. What do I do if my road or street doesn't get plowed?

Please call the DPW - Roads Division at 410-548-4872. It takes a minimum of 12 to 14 hours to plow the roads throughout the county (700 miles) in a small storm; more severe storms can take much longer. If you believe your road has been missed, call as soon as possible.

11. What constitutes the necessity of the declaration of a state of emergency by the county executive during a major snow event?

The following is from the Wicomico County Charter, Chapter 15, Article III, Section 15-7...

A. Notwithstanding any provision of this Code to the contrary, when the County Executive determines, in his sole discretion, that a local emergency exists within the county and that public safety is imperiled thereby, the County Executive may, by proclamation, declare a local emergency throughout the county or for any part thereof.

B. In the event such local emergency is declared, the county shall be governed by emergency and mutual aid agreements and such laws, resolutions and rules and regulations as are necessary to implement such plans and agreements.

C. A declaration of a local state of emergency shall activate the response and recovery



aspects of any and all applicable local state of emergency plans and to authorize the furnishing of aid and assistance thereunder.

D. The county may request the Governor to provide assistance, if the County Executive determines that the disaster is beyond the capacity of local government to meet adequately and state assistance is necessary to supplement local efforts to save lives and to protect property, public health and safety, or to avert or lessen the threat of disaster.