

Winter Maintenance – Are you prepared?

Municipalities are mandated to provide safe roads for the travelling public during the winter season. To meet this mandate, municipalities undertake a number of activities, such as plowing, salting and sanding to ensure that winter road surfaces remain clear and safe. Controlling snow and ice is a key part of any winter maintenance program.

Winter Season Preparation

Well ahead of the winter season, public works departments begin their preparations. This usually includes:

- 1) Ordering salt and sand
- 2) Ready equipment by mounting plows, wings, brine tanks, sanding boxes and other equipment onto vehicles
- 3) Recalibrating equipment
- 4) Conducting pre-season meetings with staff and contractors to explain service levels, route familiarization
- 5) Training new staff in service levels and equipment

Do Your Winter Season Preparations Include Reviewing Your Documents?

Here are some key issues to consider:

- Do supervisors review last year's records to determine whether they are being fully and accurately completed by every employee?
- Do they look for inconsistencies between the sanding sheets and the patrol and dispatch records?
- Do they determine when notations are made – at the time or after the fact?
- Do they determine whether or not operators are following patrollers' instructions?
- Do the operators stay on the prescribed route?
- Do they change routes when advised to?

Do Your Records Clearly Indicate?

- a) Trigger response for plows to be deployed
- b) Date and time the response was triggered
- c) Time the plow operator booked in for work
- d) Operations performed during his shift
- e) Time the operator stopped working
- f) Reason the operator stopped working
- g) Operational instructions were followed

Balance of Probabilities

A civil trial may be brought against a municipality if a motorist is injured and feels the accident was caused by a non-repair of roadway. The case will be decided based upon "the balance of probabilities". The Plaintiff must prove, on a balance of probabilities, that the condition of non-repair existed and that the non-repair caused the damages. The Municipality must prove, on a balance of probabilities, that the non-repair did not exist and that the damage was not caused by the alleged non-repair. Documentation provides the evidence that the municipality met its duty of care. It provides the evidence that: (1) standardized policies or procedures existed and were followed; and (2) regular inspections were conducted and necessary maintenance performed.

Do your records tip the balance of probabilities in your favour?