

City Readies for Winter Weather

By Mike Barhorst

Way back in the Stone Age when I was in school and students were expected to memorize the Preamble to the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address, passages from Shakespeare and even poetry, one of the poems I had to memorize became a favorite of mine. That poem was *The Last Leaf* written by Oliver Wendell Holmes,

While in Sidney and elsewhere, the last leaves still cling to the trees, City crews have been working since early fall to prepare for the next winter season. One of the annual events that foreshadows the arrival of winter is the Snow Plow Rodeo. That event was held at Custerborder Field on October 8. This year's winners include Jeff Poeppelmank, who works in the Water Distribution Department, Mike Siegel, who works in the Street Department and Kurt Poeppelman, who works in the Fleet Maintenance Department.

Nearly simultaneously, Council was updated on the City's Snow & Ice Management Plan. I'd like to share the details of that plan with you.

Each storm is different and must be handled that way. Time of day, forecasted conditions, ice, snow, sleet or some other mixture of precipitation, temperature, depth of snow and materials on hand all play a part in how the City attacks the treatment of its paved surface. The City averages 34 snow/ice events per year with a season average snowfall of 32.1 inches. While each event is different, the City must consistently maintain its 111+ miles of streets, 104 cul-de sacs, 62 dead ends and 18+ miles of alleyways.

Last year we knew we had a salt shortage looming for the year and salt prices were very high. This year we do not expect a shortage and the per ton price is substantially lower than last year. The City currently has about 500 tons of salt and 200 tons of salt/sand mix on site; the City has a storage capacity of 800 tons of material. In addition, the City is under contract with the Ohio Department of Transportation for 1,200 tons of salt this year at \$70 per ton delivered (compared to \$111 per ton last year, and we had to pick it up!) Our ten-year average annual salt usage is 1,400 tons per year.

City crews are preparing to treat roadways with the same plan of action as last year. That plan includes more pre-treating with brine and beet juice mixture prior to the event. Main roadways, roadway with hills and alleys with hills will be addressed at 2+ inches of snow. Crews will not plow residential streets & alleys unless 4+inches of snowfall has accumulated.

To conserve salt supplies and reduce costs, the City will use a salt/grit mixture which is a 3 to 1 Mix (200 tons of salt produces 800 tons of usable product) when daytime temperatures are around 30 degrees. Reducing the application of road salt is also more environmentally friendly.

New to the snow and ice plan this year is the use of automated vehicle locators. The City has equipped all of its snow plow trucks with toggle sensors on plows and spreaders to track the plow position and if the truck was spreading salt. This new technology gives the City the ability to accurately locate and identify where trucks are, where they've been and if they were plowing and salting at that location. This technology will not only allow the City to monitor whether the equipment was performing correctly, but will allow staff to provide better customer service.

I'd also like to ask that our residents, commuters and those visiting our City to be safe around snowplows. The plows are wide and can cross the centerline or shoulder, so be sure to give them plenty of room to work. Don't tailgate and try not to pass trucks spreading salt or plowing snow. Snowplows travel below the posted speed limit and your patience is appreciated.

Also, a snowplow operator's field of vision is restricted. You may see them, but they don't always see you because of blowing snow. Keep your distance and watch for sudden stops or turns.

Leave plenty of time to reach your destination safely. It's not worth putting yourself and others in a dangerous situation just to be on time.

Motorists are also reminded that it is the air pressure in the car's tires that supports the weight of the vehicle. Tire pressure drops 1 to 2 pounds for every 10 degree drop in the temperature. If you have not checked your tire pressure since summer, I would encourage you to do so, and to continue to check the pressure throughout the winter months. Underinflated tires are one of the leading causes of tire failure.

Finally, if the sign by the side of the road says Speed Limit 45 MPH, that means that 45 is the safest maximum speed when the driving conditions are perfect - during daylight hours, when the traffic is light, and when the weather is good. When conditions aren't perfect – and they aren't much of the time - the posted speed limit is actually too fast to be safe.

Ohio's winter weather provides any number of challenges ranging from swirling snow to sleet to freezing rain. Slow down below the posted speed limit. It is much better that you arrive at your destination late than never to arrive at all. We want you to enjoy the holidays with your loved ones, ready to begin the new year!