

# Snow Removal FAQ

## 1. Why can't you plow my street now?

We wish we had enough snow plows and drivers to take care of every street right away, but our resources are limited, so we must adhere to a carefully laid out system for clearing the streets. If we allowed our plows to be diverted each time a special request is made, it would take longer to get all streets in the city cleared.

### Plowing priorities:

- 1) All major streets. Examples include South Westledge Avenue, Oakland Drive, Milham Avenue, Kilgore Road, Shaver Road, Lovers Lane, etc.
- 2) All primary "feeder" streets leading into various residential neighborhoods, including access streets to all schools.
- 3) All interior neighborhood streets.
- 4) Cleanup of cul-de-sacs and dead ends streets.

## 2. The plow left some snow at the end of my driveway. Can you send someone to clear it?

The city does not plow private driveways. One thing you can do to minimize the problem is to clear snow to the right side of your driveway (facing your house from the street). This gives some of the snow a place to go as the plow goes by and will minimize what ends up in your driveway. A clear illustration of this practice can be found on the city website, Snow Removal webpage.

## 3. Can you tell me exactly when my street will be plowed?

Due to ever-changing weather conditions, we are not able to give you an estimate of when your street will be cleared. As weather conditions change, we often must alter our snow-fighting strategy in the middle of snow removal operations in order to try to control drifting snow, ice or other special problems.

## 4. Why don't the trucks plow and salt on the way to their routes?

Each snow plow has an assigned section. If the trucks spread salt on the way to their destination, they won't have enough to spread in their sections. Additionally, other drivers passing through may plow off the salt without realizing it. Plowing along the way would mean it would take that much longer for the truck to reach its assigned section.

## 5. Why does my cul-de-sac have so much snow?

Big plow trucks are used to plow an initial access path in all cul-de-sacs. When all major and local roads have been cleared, a 4x4 truck will return to each cul-de-sac to cleanup as needed. Snow will be removed from the middle of cul-de-sacs only when piles create an obstacle when maneuvering. Please note that cul-de-sacs are lower on our plowing priority list, since we have fewer residents living on them. We ask for your patience and our trucks will get to you.

## 6. I just cleared my sidewalk and the plow filled it in. Is there something you can do?

As we plow from curb to curb, snow may fall onto the sidewalks. Unfortunately, there are some areas where the curb lawn is narrow and the plowed snow covers the sidewalks. Some have suggested the plows go through these areas at a slower speed so the snow is

not thrown that far. However, plows must maintain a certain speed to keep the snow from sticking to the blades. We also do not store snow on the curb lawn because it can cause visibility problems for traffic.

**7. Why don't you plow down the middle of the street, to open it to traffic faster?**

Our practice is to plow from curb to curb, which is why you see our plow trucks typically make three or more passes on each side of the street. This is to clear the street as much as possible the first time we come through; due to changing weather conditions, we might not be back for a while. Snow that is left behind will harden, making it more difficult to remove when we return.

**8. I hire someone to plow my driveway. Is there anything I should know?**

Yes -- According to the Michigan Vehicle Code (Section 257.677a), a person cannot place snow, ice, or slush on any road or highway. Residents clearing their own snow, or private companies hired to do so, must keep the snow on the property it came from.

**9. Why do you sometimes salt instead of plow, or plow instead of salt?**

Different weather events require the use of different techniques. The decision whether to salt or plow depends on the weather conditions. For example, if the temperature is below 20 degrees and not expected to rise, salt will not be effective. But if the sun is shining, and the temperature is 20 degrees or higher and expected to stay steady or rise, then salt would be more effective. Plowing under the wrong conditions can create a polished street surface, resulting in dangerous glare ice.

**10. I saw a plow parked at a gas station during a snow storm. Why wasn't it out working?**

Driving a snow plow is demanding, tiring work. Common sense and good safety practices dictate that, during an eight-hour shift, a driver should take a 15-minute break every four hours and a 30-minute lunch break. In fact, this is required in their contracts. It is dangerous, both for the plow driver and the public, if a fatigued driver is behind the wheel of a snow plow. It is in the best interest of all concerned for drivers to take occasional breaks.

**11. Why do I sometimes see plow trucks on the streets when it's not snowing?**

There are several possible reasons:

- Every driver participates in pre-season training. Skills must be sharpened and routes must be learned and re-learned.
- Trucks may be scanning the city for secondary clearing opportunities (like where vehicles were parked during plowing, which have since moved). This happens often.
- Trucks also may be hauling snow and/or returning from a drop-off.

**12. Why aren't plows on the roads in anticipation of a big storm in the forecast?**

The short answer is that we just don't have the staff or resources to do this. Additionally, as weather conditions can change quickly, this could waste time by working crews that have nothing to plow. DPS management and the Police Department monitor weather changes so we can call in crews as needed. From December to March, we generally have 24-hour coverage during the week, with staff covering weekends as weather conditions require.

**13. Salt corrodes my car, sidewalk, and driveway. Can you use sand instead?**

We don't use sand because it doesn't work in all situations. In an urban setting like Portage, sand washes into and can clog our storm sewers.

**14. I have a heart condition. Can you plow my street in case there is an emergency?**

The potential for a medical emergency does not warrant priority treatment. Anyone needing an ambulance in a medical emergency should call 911 and the situation will be handled in an appropriate manner.

**15. What are the winter parking rules?**

Overnight on-street parking is prohibited between 2:00 a.m. – 6:00 a.m., November 1 through April 15.

**16. What should I do if a plow hits or damages my mailbox?**

Please contact the Public Services office (269) 329-4444. We will replace damaged mailboxes, which were in previously good condition, on a case-by-case basis. Please take a moment to review the City of Portage Damaged Mailbox Policy for more information.

**17. Who is responsible for plowing sidewalks?**

Property owners are responsible for clearing snow/ice from sidewalks in front of their residence or business within 24 hours following a snow or ice event.

**18. What do we spend on snow plowing?**

For the 2016-2017 season, we have a budget of roughly \$900,000. Plowing is funded by state Public Act 51 money, which comes from the gas and weight taxes. Local taxes do not fund snow plowing operations. Overall, budgets have remained flat or slightly less over time, and we face increased expenses. The budget reflects fluctuating fuel costs, increasing equipment costs and salt costs.