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# Green Sheet

*City of Ann Arbor Environmental News*

October 2008

## WHITE SNOW, GREEN STREETS

### A2 Winter Street Maintenance

Michigan's winter weather includes light dustings of powdery snow, slushy mixes of snow and ice, storms that dump up to 20 or more inches of snow, and everything in between. Because of the range of winter precipitation, many factors must be weighed to determine the best snow and ice control strategies for the Ann Arbor community. The Public Services Street Maintenance Division is prepared to provide around-the-clock service to address concerns for safety, the environment, costs, practicality, and time.

Snow and ice control measures are initiated when a forecast predicts a 40 percent or greater chance of snow accumulation or when requested by safety services personnel. Ann Arbor does not follow a bare pavement practice, but attempts to provide increased road traction where needed. The city's first response in all snow and ice events is to clear 94 miles of major streets, which typically takes five hours. A straight salt (sodium chloride) application is used on major roads and locations with a history of accidents. After major streets are cleared, crews clear 200 miles of residential streets, which takes up to an additional 24 hours.

Most snow conditions can be addressed by the city's winter street maintenance staff over two normal shifts. Crews operate 14 high-speed snow plows with computer calibrated salt-spreaders, and an additional six high speed plows without spreaders. For snowfalls greater than four inches, additional cross-trained city crews operate other city vehicles fitted with plows to assist with plowing residential streets, regardless of the day or time of the snow event. Because of the intensive vehicle parking on many neighborhood streets, Ann Arbor is not able to provide uniform curb-to-curb snow clearing outside of the major streets. Snow plows clear a center lane throughout neighborhoods.

### Did you know...

Street snow and ice control is funded by the State of Michigan from the state fuel tax, which is currently assessed at \$0.19 per gallon of fuel purchased. Funds from this tax are distributed to the 533 cities and villages in Michigan to cover the costs of street maintenance. No property taxes or 6% sales tax from gasoline purchases is used for winter road maintenance.



### Snow emergency

During a severe winter storm, a snow emergency may be declared by the City Administrator. Special parking restrictions go into effect during a snow emergency. On days with odd-numbered dates, parking is only permitted on the side of the street with odd-numbered street addresses. On days having even-numbered dates, parking is only permitted on the side of the street with even-numbered addresses. Illegally parked cars may be towed and ticketed.

When a snow emergency is in effect, residents may call the city snow desk at 734.994.2359 for information on plowing throughout the city. Snow information is also posted online at [www.a2gov.org/snow](http://www.a2gov.org/snow), via press releases, and on CTN's CitiTV on channel 19.

## Environmental Impacts of Salt and Sand

Salt melts snow and ice on the road by lowering the freezing point. Salt is not effective when pavement temperatures are below 18 degrees F. Under icy conditions, sand may be applied to provide road friction until the salt can begin to work.

Ten years ago the Ann Arbor City Council passed a resolution to switch from 100 percent salt application on residential streets to a mixture of 95 percent sand and 5 percent salt. This decision was based on research and recommendations from the Huron River Watershed Council, which had found high levels of salt contamination in the Huron River. High levels of salt harm fish, aquatic plants, and other organisms and increase costs to process the river water for drinking water at the municipal water treatment plant. In neighborhoods, high levels of road salt can also have a detrimental effect on grass and trees and can promote rust on the metal undersides of vehicles.

Because of salt's environmental impacts, it is city policy to use the least amount of salt that allows for safe driving conditions. The amount of salt used depends on snowfall rates, time of day, and pavement conditions. The city uses a road weather information service, which estimates road and pavement conditions based on current weather conditions and air and pavement temperatures through the day. The city also uses portable pavement temperature readers to determine pavement temperatures. Even on very cold days, solar warming can raise pavement temperatures 20-30 degrees above air temperatures, so that no road salt is needed.

When sand is added to roads, it acts as an abrasive to add traction. A small amount of salt in the mixture prevents the sand from freezing. Although using sand decreases the salt contamination of our waterways, large quantities of sand clog street gutters, which requires additional maintenance to sweep streets and clean drains.

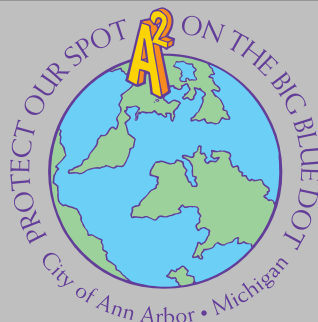


### How can you help?

Remove vehicles from street parking during heavy snowfalls. If off-street parking is not available, coordinate with neighbors to park cars on one side of the street. The plows will be able to clear more of the pavement, which will make parking and driving safer and easier on Ann Arbor residential streets. Residents should also keep dumpsters, trash carts, and recycling bins and carts out of snow banks and reasonably accessible to collectors.

### Keeping Sidewalks Clear of Snow

Ann Arbor citizens are required to shovel sidewalks in front of their residences for pedestrian safety. A city ordinance on sidewalk snow removal (violations can result in fines up to \$1000) identifies the responsibilities of residents in removing snow from sidewalks. The full sidewalk and crosswalk ramps are to be shoveled within 24 hours after the end of each snow accumulation greater than one inch. To assist with winter sidewalk maintenance, Ann Arbor residents may fill their own five-gallon bucket with a salt/sand mixture from the city's maintenance yard at 721 N. Main Street. For information, call 734.994.1617. Clearing snow and ice from sidewalks should be looked upon as a combination of courtesy and caring toward all those who need to use the public walkways.



Green Sheet is an environmental newsletter for Ann Arbor citizens, coordinated by the City Communications Office. Please send your suggestions and article ideas to Nancy Stone, [nstone@a2gov.org](mailto:nstone@a2gov.org), 734.994.4176.

For more information on the City of Ann Arbor's green initiatives visit: [www.a2gov.org/green](http://www.a2gov.org/green). For snow information visit: [www.a2gov.org/snow](http://www.a2gov.org/snow).