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For immediate release

County snowplow driver: 'Give us the room that we need'

Winter's wrath is back, and so are the folks who aren't taking proper precautions when the snow flies.

One of the most common problems -- and a violation of [Minnesota statutes](#) -- is residents who push, shovel or blow snow out into the street or to the opposite side of the road, says Doug Assink, maintenance supervisor with Rice County's Highway Department.

While it may sound minor, moving snow from place to place compacts and hardens it, says Assink. Couple that with thawing and refreezing -- which has happened already this season -- and pretty soon that innocent pile becomes as hard as a rock.

Assink's seen plows inadvertently hit those masses and send chunks of ice into the air, which can damage the plow.

Removing gravel from roadways -- also illegal -- creates another potential problem for plow drivers: low spots that fill with water, which then freeze and make the road less safe for drivers.

But perhaps the most common problem, says Assink, is one the Minnesota Department of Transportation reminds motorists of annually: staying about 10 car lengths back from snowplows.

Plow drivers on local roads don't typically travel faster than 35 mph. Their speed is dictated by road conditions, the moisture content in the snow and the amount of sand and salt they're hauling.

Vehicles traveling too closely behind a plow take a huge risk, says Assink, noting that conditions up ahead can force the driver to slow unexpectedly. Another problem are the huge clouds of snow plows often create, which can cut visibility for plow drivers and motorists to zero.

Crashes involving vehicles that hit snowplows are typically caused by inattentive drivers, motorists driving too close to the plow or driving too fast for conditions, according to MnDOT.

Tailgaters can also limit a plow drivers' ability to put out salt and sand, he said.

"Give us the room that we need," said Assink, "so we can do the best job possible."

Some tips from Minnesota's Toward Zero Deaths' Do Your Part by Driving Smart campaign:

- Never drive distracted.
- Stay alert for snowplows, which turn or exit frequently and may travel over centerlines or partially in traffic to further improve road conditions.
- Stay back at least 10 car lengths behind the plow. Don't drive into a snow cloud.



Blowing or pushing snow onto the roadway is illegal. While it's snow today, the freeze-thaw cycle will turn it rock hard and make it dangerous for vehicles, including snowplows.

- Slow down to a safe speed for current conditions.
- Turn on your headlights and always wear your seat belt.
- Turn off the cruise control.
- Be patient and remember snowplows are working to improve road conditions.

Sign up to receive MnDOT text messages and/or email alerts during significant winter weather events affecting roads in southeast Minnesota at bit.ly/3F0l7gt. Check 511mn.org for road conditions, traffic incidents, weather information, camera footage and more.

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