



**CITY of CRYSTAL**

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For questions about Crystal snow plow operations, contact Streets Superintendent Bill Bowman at [bill.bowman@crystalmn.gov](mailto:bill.bowman@crystalmn.gov), 763-531-1164.

## **SNOW PLOWING FAQs**

**Q. My hill is icy. Can you send someone out to put salt/sand down?**

**A.** Salt request locations will be checked as part of the normal checks of major roads and hills.

**Q. My cul-de-sac is icy. Can you send someone to put salt/sand down?**

**A.** Major roadways and hills are top priority for addressing ice conditions. The city has a limited salt supply and budget available. Cul-de-sacs have very low traffic volumes and low speeds, and are therefore a lower priority.

**Q. The snow is piled so high it is creating a visibility issue. Can the city come out and remove some of the snow mounds?**

**A.** After large or multiple snow events, where the snow banks are quite high on streets throughout the City, equipment is sent out to push back snow piles when needed.

**Q. Is the city still plowing? If so, where are they? They have not come down my street yet.**

**A.** When the city gets 1.5 inches of snow or more, it does a full plow of all city streets and alleys. If there is less than 1.5 inches in accumulation, the city may send out trucks to salt main roads and hills.

**Q. The snowplow hit my garbage/recycling cart, and it's now in the street.**

**A.** When plowing, snow is pushed from the center of the road to the side of the road. It is unlikely that a plow pushed it into the road. The city appreciates residents keeping their garbage carts out of the roadways and a few feet behind the curb.

**Q. The snowplow hit my garbage/recycling cart.**

**A.** Trash and recycling carts need to be placed off the street and behind the curb on collection day. The city is not responsible for damaged garbage/recycling carts. Call your hauler for a replacement cart if needed.

**Q. Can you tell me when the plow will come by my house? I need to leave for work by 7 a.m.**

**A.** After a snowfall of 1.5 inches, all city streets are plowed curb to curb. Crews work systematically to clear all the streets; however, routes may change due to a variety of factors such as parked vehicles or traffic. When the weather cooperates, crews start very early in the morning to clear main roads before the morning rush hour.

**Q. If you don't know when the plows will come by, can residents just plow the street?**

**A.** Residents cannot plow city streets.

**Q. Can plows drive slower?**

**A.** Snowplow trucks generally operate below 20 miles per hour while plowing residential streets. Due to the size of the truck and the noise of the engine, the trucks can appear to be traveling faster than they are.

**Q. Can you lift or turn your plow at my driveway?**

**A.** Operators will not lift or turn their plow at the ends of driveways. Doing so would leave a large pile of snow in the road, and turning the plow for every driveway is not feasible.

**Q. Can you plow the snow away from (out of) the cul-de-sac, instead of around the cul-de-sac, leaving all of the snow in my yard?**

**A.** To effectively plow the cul-de-sac, snow is pushed to the nearest curb. Cul-de-sacs have limited space for snow storage and it is a challenge to avoid driveways, mailboxes and fire hydrants.

**Q. Why has my street not been plowed all winter?**

**A.** During snow events, the focus is on main roads and hills. After a snowfall of 1.5 inches, all city streets will be plowed curb to curb. It is unlikely a road would be intentionally missed. If you think your street has been missed, please contact the Streets Superintendent. With warmer temperatures and melting snow pack, it may turn slushy. Some residents may see the slush and think the road has not been plowed.

**Q. Can you time plowing to give me time to remove the plow mound from my driveway early in the morning? When I come home from work I cannot get in my driveway.**

**A.** A full snow plowing cleanup operation typically starts as soon as the snowfall has ended. When weather cooperates, crews will try and start early in the morning to complete most streets by 8 am.

**Q. Would the snowplow please leave less or no snow at the end of my driveway?**

**A.** The street is plowed by pushing the snow from the street to the side. The operator has very little control over how much snow is deposited at the end of driveways.

**Q. The snowplow damaged my mailbox. Who will fix it?**

**A.** The city will conduct a review of each mailbox incident to determine whether a snowplow came into direct contact with it or its support structure. The city will only repair mailboxes actually hit by a snowplow and install it to United States Postal Service Residential Mailbox Standards. The city is not responsible for damage to mailboxes or support posts caused by snow or ice contacting the mailbox.

Based on the city's review, the city will repair the mailbox to an operational state. If the mailbox cannot be adequately repaired, the city will replace it with a standard size, non-decorative metal mailbox. The city may also replace the support post as necessary with a 4" x 4" decay-resistant wood support post, if necessary. Dents, scratches, or other superficial damage that does not prohibit normal use of the mailbox will be considered normal wear and tear and will not be repaired or replaced by the city.

**Q. The snowplow damaged my yard. Who will fix it?**

**A.** The property will be added to a list of repairs. Crews will restore damaged turf in the spring with dirt and seed. Property owners are responsible for watering, if needed.

**Q. How many plows does the city have?**

**A.** The city has six plow trucks, two sidewalk plows and six pieces of various equipment for plowing cul-de-sacs, dead ends, parking lots and trails.

**Q. The street is getting narrow, can a plow come widen the road?**

**A.** When plowing, the snow is simply being pushed to the side of the road. Over the course of the winter, the streets will get narrower as the banks get higher. If necessary, city crews may deploy equipment to push back snow banks.

**Q. Can I push snow from my driveway into or across the street?**

**A.** State Statute 169.42 prohibits snow from being pushed into or across the street.

**Q. Can I park on the street after it has been plowed?**

**A.** When a snow emergency is declared, no on-street parking is allowed until the streets have been plowed curb to curb. There is no on street parking city-wide, 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. year round.

**Q. How do I find out if a snow emergency has been declared?**

**A.** Residents can find out if a snow emergency has been declared through the city's social media accounts, news outlets and the city website.

**Q. I am remodeling my home and have a dumpster in my driveway, I am asking the contractors to park on the street. Can you make sure they don't get tickets?**

**A.** During a snowfall of 1.5 inches or more, no on-street parking is allowed until the street has been plowed curb-to-curb. This includes contractors. The parking restriction is in effect to allow plow operators to clear the entire street curb to curb of snow so the street can be returned to normal winter conditions as quickly as possible. Vehicles parked on the street not only hinder this process, they also reduce the efficiency of the plow trucks.

**Q. What roads do Hennepin County and MnDOT plow?**

**A.** MnDOT owns and maintains Hwy. 100. Hennepin County owns and maintains county highways in Crystal: Douglas Dr., West Broadway, Bass Lake Rd., Medicine Lake Rd., Winnetka Ave., and 42nd Ave.

**Q. How is Crystal's snow plow operation different than MnDOT's?**

**A.** Hwy. 100 serves nearly 100,000 vehicles per day that typically travel at highway speeds. The expectations for the road conditions are at a higher level (bare pavement or getting back to these conditions as quickly as feasible). MnDOT has the staff and equipment to run a 24-hour continuous operation, if needed, to get road conditions back to acceptable levels. In the City of Crystal, the busiest city street is 36<sup>th</sup> Ave. between Douglas Dr. and Hwy. 100 serving nearly 20,000 vehicles per day. After 36<sup>th</sup> Ave., the next highest volume streets are less than 4,000 vehicles per day. Over 60% of all the city's public works staff (across all public works divisions) have an assignment during a full plow. The city simply does not have the staff to run a continuous full plow operation. For more information on MnDOT's plowing operations, please visit: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/maintenance/faq.html>

**Q. What are public work's goals for winter roadway conditions?**

**A.** The city's goal for the main streets is bare pavement in the wheel tracks. The exception is 36th Ave., where the goal is for bare pavement in each travel lane. For city streets with hills (not main streets), the goal is a bare pavement strip down the middle of the road. As noted previously, after 36<sup>th</sup> Ave., the next busiest streets have less than 4,000 vehicles per day. But the vast majority of Crystal streets have under 1,000 vehicles per day. This translates to around one vehicle per minute, even during busier times.

By providing a mostly bare pavement center strip on streets with hills (that are not main roads), drivers are able to get some of their wheels on bare pavement the vast majority of the time. On the flatter residential streets, there is not a bare pavement goal. Drivers are encouraged to drive slower and use care. That said, when the weather gets closer to 30 degrees, city crews go out and scrape the streets mechanically to remove the snow pack. This is more cost effective and environmentally friendly than trying to do the same with salt. While the goal is for various levels of bare pavement, weather conditions can significantly impact how quickly the goal can be met. Salt is not effective below 15F degrees and extended snow events or ones with significant accumulation will take longer to recover from.

## **SIDEWALKS**

**Q. Can you put salt/sand on the sidewalks?**

**A.** The city does not salt/sand sidewalks. With the available resources it is just not feasible.

**Q. Why does the sidewalk plow throw snow all over the steps to my house after I have already cleaned them?**

**A.** During the snow removal process, it is difficult to see all features along a route due to the blowing snow. Sometimes the regular route driver is unavailable and another staff member covers the route who is less familiar with it. Operators try to minimize the amount of snow placed on already cleared driveways, walkways and stairs, but some snow will miss the target due to the nature of the operation. If there is a specific concern or question, please contact the streets superintendent.

## **OTHER**

**Q. Does the city clear snow away from fire hydrants?**

**A.** The city does not have the resources to clear snow away from all city fire hydrants. It is strongly encouraged that the home owner take responsibility for clearing the snow away from a fire hydrant in their yard. The West Metro Fire Department has an Adopt a Hydrant program. For more information, please visit: <http://www.wmfrd.org/public-education/adopt-a-hydrant>.

**Q. There is too much snow at the end of my driveway. Will the city plow it?**

**A.** The city is not responsible for plowing privately-owned parking lots and driveways, and does not have the resources to do it.

**Q. Why is salt bad for the environment?**

**A.** When salt is applied to streets the salt cannot be re-captured. According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, one teaspoon of salt contaminates five gallons of water (<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/salt-and-water-quality>). The salt can also be hard on the plants and grass along the roadways. The previous link provides the best and most accurate information regarding the concerns about salt impact on water quality. Some other resources include this MPR story: <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2017/12/06/road-salt-water-pollution> and another MPCA article: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/salty-water-growing-problem-minnesota>

**Q. Does salt have a negative impact on infrastructure like it does on vehicles?**

**A.** Salt is corrosive to infrastructure and vehicles. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has a website with some information on the impacts of chlorides (salt) on infrastructure: <http://tinyurl.com/y8zysjb2>. Here is an article from Michigan as well: <http://tinyurl.com/yagpkf8p>.

**Q. What source does the city use for weather forecast information?**

**A.** Crystal Public Works uses the information provided by the National Weather Service for all winter operation decision making. This information is free and available to the public at [www.weather.gov/mpx](http://www.weather.gov/mpx).

**Q. What is the most important thing drivers should be aware of when plows are out?**

**A.** The drivers need room to work. This includes backing up. Stay back and do not crowd the plow.

**Q. What is one thing the public may not know about winter operations?**

**A.** During the summer, the city receives various speeding and cut-through traffic complaints from residents. The goal of winter operations is to provide improved road conditions on main roads. A side benefit is that drivers should drive slower on residential streets and stay on main roads as close to their destination as possible rather than drive through a neighborhood. Snow removal operations are a balancing act between making the roads operational, environmental impacts, infrastructure impacts and cost considerations. We do expect drivers to drive slower on residential streets in the winter, but they should be able to get to and from their home, which is why the main roads and hills have varying levels of bare pavement goals.