

Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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April 22, 2015

“Street Sweepers Necessary for Clean City”

One of the most important aspects of sanitation in a city is keeping the streets clean. Centuries ago, people with a broom and a shovel were hired to clean off litter, wastes and debris from the street. The dirt is still there although cities, including the City of Norfolk, now use huge mechanical sweepers to remove the dirt from miles of pavement.

Dan Schmidt and Pat Ruitenberg man the two street sweepers in Norfolk that are responsible for cleaning 140 miles of streets throughout Norfolk.

“You wouldn’t think there would be so much to pick up. We actually sweep up tons of trash each year including everything from dead animals and broken glass to hypodermic needles and rocks,” said Schmidt, “It’s an



environmental and a health issue. Sweepers help alleviate excess dust and other particulates that find their way into the air. Pollen, chemicals, mold spores and poisons are in the dirt that we remove from the streets.”

The street salt, dead birds and other debris has to be picked up by the sweepers before a heavy rain washes them into the storm water system and ultimately into the Elkhorn River.

Schmidt takes to the streets with a new \$185,000 street sweeper purchased this winter by the City street division. He has been behind the controls of a sweeper for 16 years working his way across the streets ten hours a day Monday through Thursday from late February until the end of November. Ruitenberg has

Dan Schmidt, City of Norfolk street sweeper operator, cleans the streets from his vantage point on the right side of the cab where he can get a closer look at the curb edge. There is also a steering wheel on the left hand side of the cab for when he is cleaning next to medians.

been cleaning the streets for six years. During the winter months, both men take apart the machines, replacing rubber curtains and cleaning and recoating the hopper before the next year’s use.

A fan blowing at 1600-1800 revolutions per minute forces air down onto the street to break up the large particles and blow them to the side and up into the hopper that holds six cubic yards of debris.

Water is used with the steel brushes to keep the dust down allowing them to run as long as the temperature is above freezing. Even with regular maintenance, the sweepers need to be traded off at least every seven years. This year the city was given \$70,000 on trade for the old 2008 sweeper.

Twice a day Schmidt and Ruitenbergh take their loads of debris to the street division on 1010 South 8th Street which are then hauled by trucks to the transfer station on Monroe Avenue where the large pieces are screened out. The dirt, sand and gravel that are left can be used for fill projects.

Besides contributing to the health of the city, the street sweepers also make the streets safer by picking up nails that might have fallen out of a truck full of discarded shingles. The sweepers can't pick up objects wider than 12 inches and Schmidt cautions people not to sweep their lawn clippings into the street for them to pick up.

"Our sweepers are not meant to pick up people's lawn clippings or anything else that belongs in a trash receptacle. We have had to get out of our trucks before to pick up larger items which takes extra time. People who are intentionally throwing trash or grass into the street can be fined," Schmidt said.

He asked that although there is a very small chance that gravel will hit a car following a street sweeper, it's still best that drivers keep at least a car's length behind the sweeper. People also need to be patient behind the sweepers that travel at about two to three miles per hour. Drivers need to watch the lit arrow board on the back of the sweeper telling which side they can pass on.

And although you might not see them, there is someone in the sweeper drivers' seat – European style. The men clean the streets from their vantage point on the right side of the cab where they can get a closer look of the curb edge. There is also a steering wheel on the left hand side of the cab for when they're cleaning next to medians.