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“Working at Clearing the Streets”

Jim Dooley, Operations Manager for the City of Norfolk, hears it often. “Why aren’t the City’s streets as clear as the state highways?”

“It’s easy for folks to come to the conclusion that the City’s streets should be dry and free of ice because people travel on Highway 81 and it’s clear. The thing is, there’s a big difference between clearing snow from busy highways and clearing it from City streets,” Dooley said.

He explained that the state highways can be cleared during a snowfall as the plows don’t have to travel around parked vehicles and can usually get miles of pavement cleared and salted within an hour. With streets, however, snowplows can get held up because of slow moving traffic and parked cars making the process of clearing snow quite slow and unsafe.



“City snowplows rarely go out before 2:00 am and only after two inches of snow have fallen. There is little traffic on the streets at that time so the plowing goes much smoother and is much safer,” Dooley said, “The State Department of Roads equipment is much larger. The trucks are bigger, heavier and can handle larger plows and carry more deicer; therefore, they can salt the highways quickly and multiple times which is important when many drivers insist on driving at least

60 miles an hour on highways in winter weather. However these big rigs could not maneuver on residential streets.”

Dooley added that it would be cost prohibitive for the City to spread salt on all of the streets many times after one snowfall. He estimates that it costs the City about \$6,600 per inch of snow to clear the streets and that one snowfall can cost \$10,000 in fuel, brine and extra manpower.

Another reason snow and ice stay on the streets even after the snowplow has gone by is that traffic compacts it making it nearly impossible to get off of the pavement.

“Think of how the snow on your driveway gets compacted after you drive over it once. It’s hard to scrape up. You can imagine how hundreds of vehicles will pack the snow before we can get to it making it pretty compacted. Our snowplow blades are not able to get under that compacted snow. We use “gravity” plows which tend to ride on top of compacted snow. These plows do not have any downward hydraulic force on them. They depend strictly on the gravity of the weight of the plows. The advantage of gravity plows is that they do not tear up your streets,” Dooley said.

Dooley said that once the streets are traveled a bit and the snow pack gets broken up the plows can come back and remove the loose snowpack.

“In all cases, we ask that citizens drive with care, be patient and make our job easier by parking on the even side of the street in a snowfall,” Dooley said. For more information about snow removal go to

www.ci.norfolk.ne.us/Street.