

Snowplowing - Frequently Asked Questions

Did you know that our snow-plow drivers have about 180 lane-miles of streets, 27 parking lots, 7 miles of alley ways, 19 miles of Bi-path, and numerous sidewalks adjacent to City property to plow? We have 17 employees at the Department of Public Works, 6 large plow trucks with underbelly blades (with 2 back-up trucks), 6 pick-up plow trucks, and 2 articulating tractors with a front broom or snowblower attachment. Our goal is to have the streets plowed within 12 hours of a storm ending. While inclement weather events are still occurring, priority is given first to State Highways, Chisholm and State (US-23) and Washington Avenue (M-32), then the major streets. This can sometimes result in repeat blading of these streets over and over ahead of other streets to keep up with the weather and providing safe passage. Local or side streets and alleys are addressed after the storm ends.

The following questions are answered with the understanding that this is the preferred procedure. Please understand that these are not answers for ALL circumstances, many things may affect and change our normal procedures, such as back to back storms, unusually heavy storms, staff availability, equipment maintenance, material supplies, and even budget constraints in some cases.

Who gets plowed first after an inclement weather event?

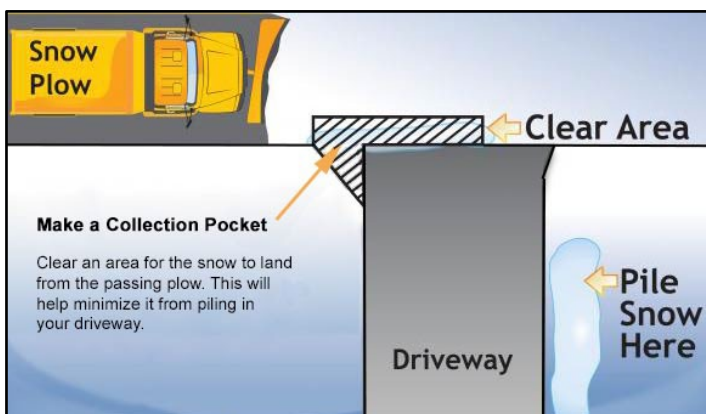
State highways and Major streets are the priority for snow plowing and salting; emergency access for hospital, fire, and police routes are part of each major street plan. Local streets are plowed after all major streets have been cleared and salted. We typically do NOT salt the local streets unless there is a need due to specific weather conditions. This determination is made by the Division Head, Department Head, and/or the City Manager.

Why do City plow trucks put all the snow from the road in my driveway?

Plow truck operators are tasked to clear all the snow from the public roadway toward the curbs. Plow trucks typically operate in tandem, using various types of plow blades to push as much snow as possible from the center of the road to the curb line. The trucks are not designed to allow for where or how the snow ends up, just that it's off the road surface and pushed to the sides. The plow drivers do not deposit the snow at the end of your driveway on purpose; it is a result of doing the job of clearing the street

Can the City remove the snow out of my driveway?

Clearing snow from the thousands of private driveways in the City of Alpena after any inclement weather event would be an insurmountable task and potentially damage private property with heavy equipment. If you clear a path of snow 10-15 feet parallel and adjacent to the curb-line before your drive approach, this will minimize the amount of snow left by plow in the driveway approach.



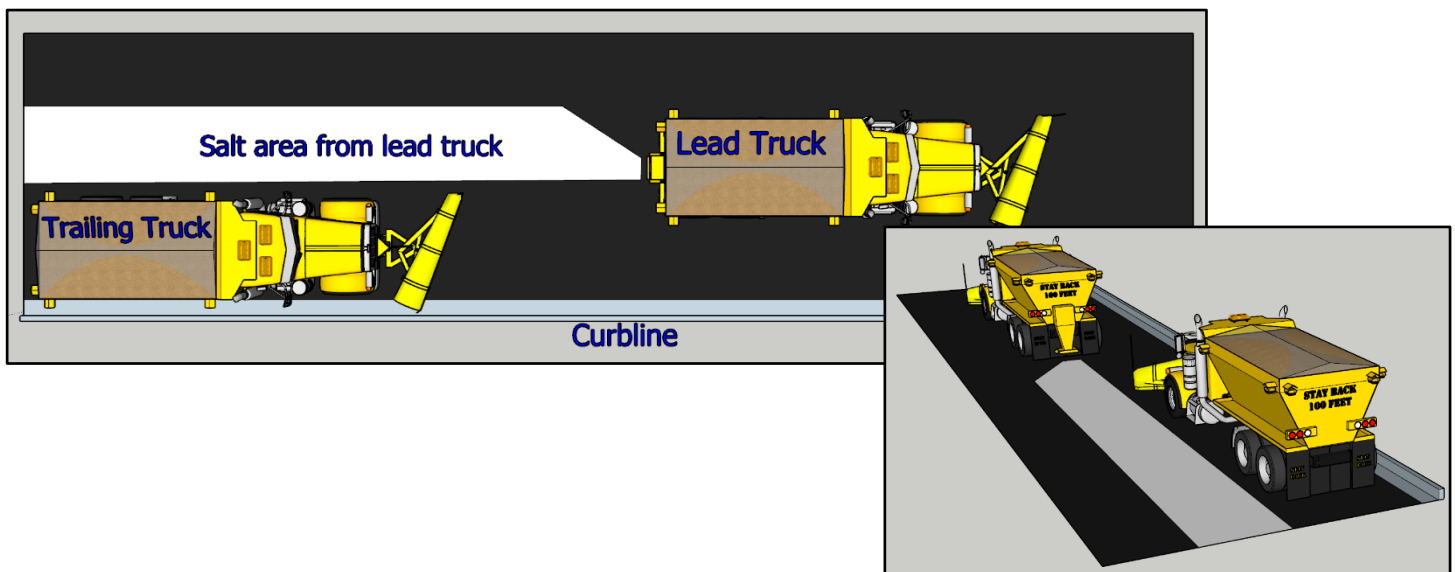
Here's a good video showing the same concept: <https://youtu.be/8Bm7mJxJOSU>

Can residents put the snow left in driveways back into the street?

Snow should be shoveled to the side of a resident's driveway and not returned to the street. Placing snow back into the public right-of-way is a violation of City ordinance and subject to citation by the Alpena Police Department.

Why does the lead truck drop salt and it appears that the second truck plows it off?

Trucks usually run in tandem with the lead truck having a salt spreader. It may appear the trailing truck would be blading off the salt dropped from the lead truck, but this is not the case. The trucks are running offset with the lead truck near the centerline and the trailing truck closer to the curb. The salt spreaders are fitted with deflector shields that control the salt coverage to drop it directly behind the lead truck and to its left toward the centerline, not in the path of the trailing truck. Salt spreaders are adjustable for the amount of salt and width of coverage, and are controlled by the driver. The slope of the street and vehicular traffic assist in pushing the salt from the centerline toward the curb line to eventually spread it over the entire road surface. See the pictures below for a better illustration.



Why do some streets have less snow and ice when plowing is done?

There are several factors which impact how clear a street will be including: when during the storm it is plowed, the amount of traffic on the road before and after plowing, the pavement temperatures, and type of pavement surface. While we try to provide consistent service, some residential streets will be clearer than others.

Why doesn't the operator keep the blade straight to push the snow forward instead of to the side?

The plow cannot possibly push all the snow off the road in this manner, the snow will eventually spill off the blade onto both sides of the truck, leaving a mess in the middle of the road and drive-lane. Under certain conditions, enough snow would build-up beneath the truck's undercarriage and could force it to a physical stop where it would become stranded in the road. The angled blade is the best way to deposit the snow to the sides and off the roadway.

If I live on an alley and park in the back, when should I expect my alley to get plowed?

Alleys are typically plowed 48-hours after a snow event with 4-wheel drive utility trucks. The sheer number of alleys (92 maintained) in the City of Alpena make it a time-consuming task to complete, and the severity of storms can affect the time required to plow each one of them.

Why doesn't the City put salt down on local streets?

The City uses salt and chloride to de-ice roads where traffic volume is heavy enough to maximize its effectiveness by carrying the materials along the road surface. Rock salt will melt snow and ice between the temperatures of 18° and 30° degrees, but its effectiveness decreases drastically as the temperature falls below 15° degrees Fahrenheit. Road salt and chloride mixtures have almost no effect below 10° degrees.

De-icing materials are not typically applied to local streets where traffic volumes are low. As stated above, we rely on traffic to increase the effectiveness of the materials and the low traffic volumes on local roads make it much less cost effective. Some local intersections may be salted, as determined by City officials, or when requested by the police or fire departments.

Who is responsible for clearing the sidewalk in front of my residence?

Property owners are responsible for clearing the pedestrian sidewalks along their property lines, per City Ordinance.

Why does the City clear some sidewalks, but not mine?

The City may clear designated school route sidewalks or other sidewalks under unique circumstances, such as bridges and adjacent to City owned properties. The City strives to clear the parts of the Bi-path not on the designated snowmobile route within 48 hours of an inclement weather event.

Why do the plow trucks throw snow from the road onto my sidewalk?

City plow trucks typically operate between 12-15 miles per hour while plowing local streets. Certain conditions may require more speed to push the existing snow over the banks, which may unintentionally fall onto the sidewalk.

Why do the drivers run down my street so fast?

It may appear that City plow trucks are moving incredibly fast, but such observations are often relative to the size of the trucks and the task they are performing which may make it seem like they are moving much faster than they are in real-time. If a citizen feels a plow truck is operating at unsafe speeds, the observer should note the time and street address and contact the Department of Public Works at 989-354-1780.

Why do plows leave windrows across intersections?

The design of the plows allows for clearing of all the snow to the right which will always leave the rows across intersections and in the end of driveways. As City crews travel to and from route locations we try to knock those rows down to make them more tolerable to pass over. On salted streets these rows dissipate quickly from traffic and melt off. On the local streets, crews will return after all streets are addressed and start to round corners and address windrows through intersections (Typically the next day if weather has subsided).

Why is my street always the last to be plowed?

Routes have been established over many years to ensure clearing of the streets in the most timely and efficient manner. There will always be a starting and finishing point. Staff, both new and old, learn these routes for consistency and pass it down through the generations of staff. The order that streets are plowed presently is the culmination of 40 years of equipment improvements, training, review, corrections, and adjustments.