

While Alcona County Road Commission crews are still working on the long list of projects for the season, thoughts are turning to preparations for the upcoming winter season. In addition to the normal activities such as getting equipment ready and stockpiling salt and sand, ways to maximize snow plowing efficiencies are being closely reviewed.

Many factors influence the amount of time it takes to plow a road. Some are beyond control such as the amount and type of snow, temperatures, and the unpredictability of weather, in general.

There are several factors, however, that are within some level of control and lead to better efficiency such as thoughtfully-planned routing, proper timing, appropriate equipment, and using the right materials.

All the efficiencies of proper planning can be undone, however, depending on how much stuff a plow driver has to maneuver around in the right of way. With that in mind, property owners are urged to remove any items they have placed in the road right of way which might have the potential to impair winter operations.

Typically, the road right of way is 33 feet out on each side of the centerline of the road. It may be wider in some areas and less in others, but in any case, is dedicated for vehicular travel, drainage, and maintenance. Any decorative fencing, landscaping, signs, structures, vehicles, equipment, driveway abutments, or other obstacle within the right of way should be removed.

"When plowing snow, the driver's main objective is to get the snow and ice cleared off the road as quickly and efficiently as possible," says Road Commission Manager Jesse Campbell. "Even the smallest interference can have an impact on efficiency. Over the course of the day, the extra time needed to plow around unnecessary objects in the right of way adds up. If the operation has to stop for equipment repair due to damage by something in the right of way, now we have a major delay."

"We are constantly brushing and clearing trees where ever and whenever we can to reduce naturally-occurring obstacles," says Campbell. He says only mailboxes and road signs are allowed within the area nearest the traveled portion of the road. Public utility lines are also permitted, but all other items are prohibited according to Michigan law.

"While there is a common perception that mailboxes are under attack in the winter, snow plow drivers do their best to avoid damage to mailboxes in the course of their duties," Campbell says. According to Campbell, most well-maintained and properly-installed mailboxes can withstand the rigors of snowplowing. He says installation of a guard structure to shield the mailbox from snow being plowed against it may be considered, but he cautions against reinforcing a mailbox so much that it won't break away if an errant vehicle hits it.

"Now would be a good time to take a look at your road front property and remove anything that will get in the way of snow plowing and also to make sure your mailbox in good repair," advises Campbell.

"We know it's a natural inclination to want to 'beautify' property along the road front," says Campbell. "But to the Road Commission, less is better, and none is best when it comes to placement of items in the road right of way that can cause a delay in snow plowing service." Campbell also points out that these items can also become hazards to motorists should a vehicle leave the roadway and strike a fixed object that has been placed within the road right of way. Such items may become a liability to the Road Commission, as well as possibly to the property owner. It is also illegal according to Michigan law to place

The Alcona County Road Commission maintains over 700 miles of roads to get you where you want to go. Questions or concerns about road right of way, winter maintenance, or proper mailbox installation, should be directed to the Alcona County Road Commission at 301 N. Lake Street, P.O. Box 40, Lincoln, Michigan 48742, by phone at 989-736-8168 or by e-mail at roads@alconacr.com