

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SNOW REMOVAL ON UNION COUNTY ROADS

1. How large is the road network under county winter maintenance jurisdiction?

Union County Public Works oversees maintenance jurisdiction on 600 road miles. That is 1,200 lane miles of paved and gravel roads. For reference, 1,200 miles is roughly equal to driving from La Grande Oregon to Phoenix Arizona. The county does not plow or sand city or state highway roads due to liability. The county does not plow or sand private roads, local access roads, or non-county maintained public roads.
2. What are the county's resources for winter maintenance?
 - 5 Plow trucks (only 1 with sander box and 2 with snow wings) with plow routes
 - 2 Spare plow trucks
 - 5 Road graders (with wings) with plow routes
 - 1 Spare road grader
 - 2 One ton pickup plows (with small sander boxes) with plow routes
 - 1 Chassis mounted snow blower
 - 1 Loader mounted snow blower

We have a one to one ratio of equipment operators to routes.
3. What are the county's hours of operation during the winter?

Our normal work hours during the winter is 6:00am to 4:30pm Monday through Thursday. We do not have the resources or budget to provide 7 days a week or 24 hours a day service coverage. We can extend the normal working hours with overtime by starting as early as 4:00am and finishing as late as 6:00pm. We do not provide 24 hour plow services; the most we can provide in a single shift is 12 hours.
4. What if I have a medical emergency and my road isn't plowed?

If you are snowed in and experience a medical emergency call 911. This will activate Union County Search and Rescue and Public Works to direct all resources to the emergency and safe transport.
5. What can impact the county's ability to plow/sand a county road?

Our county is large (2,039 square miles) and our crews cannot be everywhere at once. Staffing shortages, varying weather conditions, emergencies in other parts of the county, accidents, down trees, down power lines, equipment breakdowns, etc. impact the day to day schedules of our crews. In heavy snow conditions, it might take the entire day to make one pass with a snowplow or grader.
6. What is the cost per hour for typical plow/sand/grader operations?

The cost to mobilize equipment, materials, labor, etc. for all routes exceeds \$4,000 per hour for non-overtime (upwards of \$5,000 per hour for overtime).

7. Why does Union County have the current policy for snow removal?

Union County funds road/bridge maintenance and snow removal with funding from the State Gas Tax and SRS - Secure Rural Schools. Union County does not receive dedicated revenue for snow removal. Therefore, costs for snow removal are subtracted from the operating budget, the bank account declines, and there isn't an investment into our road/bridge network. In severe winter years the funding used for snow removal can impact (reduce) the available funds for maintenance (less money available for chip seal, bridge repairs, etc.).

8. How does the county determine which direction the snow is plowed?

Roads will be plowed with the prevailing winds. Roads running east to west will be plowed to the north and roads running north to south will be plowed to the east.

9. Does the county plow/sand on the weekend?

Yes, in some cases we do plow/sand on weekends. It is paid overtime and does become expensive. We have had it snow 40 straight days in some winters. This becomes exhausting for our crews working 7 days a week up to 12 hours a day.

10. What types of storm events can cause impacts to the county's ability to plow/sand roads?

Storms that produce snow late in the afternoon or overnight can be problematic. In most cases, we stop snow plowing around 4pm. If it is predicted to snow heavy overnight we typically schedule crews to start between 4-6am the next day. That way we can get most roads cleared for morning commutes and for school buses/emergency services.

If you have further questions, please don't hesitate to call Union County Public Works Department at 541.963.1016.

