

City of Bismarck Public Works Department

Snow Removal Frequently Asked Questions

1. Which streets are plowed first?

The crews start plowing emergency routes at 2 inches of snow. Plowing school zones and major arterials occur at 3 inches of snow, and the City will start to plow residential streets at 4 or more inches of snow accumulation. [Snow Route Map](#)

2. What can I expect regarding snow removal prior to, during and after the storm?

- The City is divided into seven plowing sections. Each section has a motor grader, a loader, and a sander truck working in it. This results in more efficient operation and eliminates piles of snow in the roadway that may become obstructions to vehicles.
- There are two 12 hour shifts per day, providing 24-hour snow clearing.
- We have 31 employees that maintain 370 center line miles or 1,480 lane miles.

PRIORITY 1: [Snow Emergency Routes](#) (Red). These streets are cleaned to ensure police, fire, and ambulance crews have access to any emergency situation.

PRIORITY 2: [School Routes](#) (Blue). As soon as the snow emergency routes are cleared, all units move to school routes. These streets interconnect high volume streets and complete the major street network.

If it is a weekend or holiday, schools will not be done at this time but will be done with regular residential plowing prior to the schools reopening.

PRIORITY 3: [Major Arterials](#) (Yellow). As soon as the snow emergency routes and schools are cleared, units move onto the major arterial streets.

PRIORITY 4: [Residential and Downtown Streets](#). Once Priorities 1, 2, and 3 are cleared and open, plows move into residential streets in their sections, concentrating first on the areas with the heaviest traffic and worst conditions. Generally, we plow these residential streets if there is 4 or more inches of snow accumulation.

3. Can you tell me when my street will be plowed?

- [See Question #2](#)
- As weather conditions change we often must alter our snow-fighting strategy in the midst of the snow removal operations in order to control drifting snow, ice or other snow fighting issues. We cannot give you an estimate of when your street will be cleared due to ever-changing weather conditions.
- You may view the [Snow Removal Operations Map](#) which displays status of snow plowing operations for the most recent snowfall. It will show what has been plowed and where we will plow in the next rotation.

4. How long does it take to plow Bismarck streets?

Our goal is to have all main and residential streets safe and passable 18-36 hours **after the snow has stopped falling**. This goal is impacted by the type and amount of snow, sustained winds, duration of the snow storm, and the timing of the storm.

5. What happens when a [Snow Emergency is Declared](#)?

- The City Administrator along with the Public Works Service Operations Director and the Chief of Police determine when a snow emergency declaration is necessary. It is broadcast by local radio and television stations and on our City web site and social media outlets.
- [Snow Emergency Declaration](#) states that any vehicle parked, stopped or abandoned on a snow emergency route in violation of this chapter may be impounded by the police department.
- Parking will be prohibited on snow emergency routes. Snow gates WILL NOT be used. Large amounts of snow are unable to stay inside the blade, damaging the gates and stopping the plow. The snow emergency declaration and parking prohibition are effective until terminated or modified by the Director of Public Works by public announcement.

Streets effected would have one of these signs posted.



6. Why do the plows always push snow into my driveway?

- For a resident this can be quite annoying, but unfortunately it cannot be helped. When snow gates are being used, there is overflow during heavy snows or drifting that flows around or over the gate and drops onto the driveway. A small, ridge of snow that can be driven over is normal and allowed by city ordinance.
- Snow Gates are used to make driveways passable and should help reduce the amount of snow deposited by snow plows into driveways. The majority of the snow will now be deposited at the side of the driveway. It is the property owner's responsibility to ensure that sightlines do not cause safety risks.
- The snow gates can only hold a limited amount of snow, and that amount is lessened with warmer temperatures and heavier, wetter precipitation. Areas that have triple driveways or driveways next to each other have no place for the snow to go except back into the driveway. Gates will reduce the size of the berm, but doesn't eliminate the berm. An 8-foot wide opening may be all that can be achieved when heavy snow or drifting occurs.

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

There are a number of factors which impact how clear a street will be including; streets plowed first may have less ice and snow, the amount of traffic on the road before and after plowing, the pavement temperatures and type of pavement surface, wind, and rainfall on snow covered streets versus clean pavement.

8. Can snow from private driveways be pushed into the street?

- **No.**
Snow should not be pushed into the street since this increases the amount of snow for the plow to move. The plow can only hold back a certain amount of snow before it flows out over or in front of the snow gate, causing snow to overflow in your driveway and the neighbors' driveway. Depositing snow from driveways and sidewalks into the street is prohibited by City ordinance (10-03-04) and creates a traffic hazard by leaving windrows or piles of snow in travel lanes. The fine or penalty for the violation shall not exceed \$1,500.00, and the imprisonment shall not exceed thirty days.
- If possible, such as in low accumulating snow events, property owners might consider clearing driveway aprons only after the snow plows have stopped plowing and the street is cleared of snow. This will eliminate the need to remove snow twice, once before and once after the snow plow has come down your street. However, in heavier snow events, property owners should consider clearing driveway aprons multiple times to prevent unmanageable amounts of snow and ice on the driveway apron due to multiple passes of the street plows and the accumulating snowfall.

9. What's the best method to use when shoveling my driveway?

- When clearing driveway aprons, deposit snow on the boulevard to the right side of the driveway (as you face the street) and as far away from the curb-line as possible. This will limit the amount of snow that the City plow deposits into driveways as the streets are cleared.
- Don't shovel or blow snow into the street since this will only need to be carried by the plow and causing the snow to spill out of the gate at the opening of your driveway and the neighbors' driveway.
- Clearing snow from your boulevard on the left side of the driveway (as you face the street) will allow for the snow in the plow to escape before the snow gate is dropped at your driveway, creating less snow at your driveway opening to hold back with the snow gate.
- **Reminder:** Depositing snow from driveways and sidewalks into the street is prohibited by City ordinance (10-03-04) and creates a traffic hazard by leaving windrows or piles of snow in travel lanes. The fine or penalty for the violation shall not exceed \$1,500.00, and the imprisonment shall not exceed thirty days.

10. Why do you sometimes salt instead of plow, or plow instead of salt?

Different types of storms require the use of different snow-fighting techniques. The decision whether to use anti-icing products, salt or plowing depends upon the expected weather conditions. For example, if the temperature is below 20 degrees and not expected to rise, salt will not be effective. But if the sun is shining and the temperature is 20 degrees or more and expected to remain steady or to rise, then salt would be more effective. The decision whether to plow, apply anti-icing products, or salt is made with great consideration and based on the latest weather information available.

11. What if I have an emergency and my street isn't plowed?

If an emergency situation occurs, call 911. Equipment will be diverted by an Emergency Service Agency; Police and/or Fire Departments, if it is determined to be a life safety response. Central Dakota Communications Center (CenCom) 911 dispatchers are in contact with PW Ops personnel during snow events so snow removal equipment can be detoured to assist with emergency response. It should be noted that it is a crime to make a false emergency request.

12. When is parking prohibited on city streets?

- Parking is also prohibited when a [Snow Emergency is Declared](#).
- [Downtown streets](#) are signed "No Parking" Street Cleaning and are in effect from November 1st – March 31st from 1AM – 7AM. Vehicles parked on these streets during the restricted dates and times will be towed at the owner's expense.

13. I own a business downtown. How are streets plowed in the downtown area?

Streets are plowed by their assigned priority level shown on the [Snow Route Map](#).

Downtown streets are signed "No Parking" Street Cleaning and are in effect from November 1st – March 31st from 1AM – 7AM. Vehicles parked on these streets during the restricted dates and times will be ticketed. During snow hauling operations, vehicles will be ticketed and towed, at the owner's expense.

North-South Streets

Signed for "no parking" on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

East-West Streets

Signed for "no parking" on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

Snow can be moved from sidewalks into the parking lanes on those streets that haven't already been plowed. Businesses along these signed street cleaning areas, that have not already been cleaned, should have their sidewalks cleaned before midnight on their designated day to allow it to be hauled away with the snow plowing operation.

14. What should I do if my vehicle was ticketed and towed for being illegally parked on the street during snow removal operations?

The Police Department coordinates all towing operations. If you find that your vehicle has been towed, contact the Police Department at 701-223-1212.

15. There was a car parked on my street when the plow came through. Will the City come back to clear the snow to the curb?

After initial plowing has been completed equipment continues to address on-street parking and intersection cleanup. Once all residential streets are safe and passable we will address resident requests for additional snow removal from parked vehicles.

16. I have an appointment this afternoon. Can you be sure to plow in front of my house before I have to leave for my appointment?

We wish we could comply with all requests, but equipment and manpower limitations do not permit us to deviate from our predetermined snow plowing operations.

17. Can I clear snow around the fire hydrant in front of my property?

- **Yes.**
The Fire Department is asking for help from citizen to participate in the **Adopt-a-Hydrant Program**. There are over 4000 hydrants in the city of Bismarck and many of them can become inaccessible due to snow from around the hydrants in their neighborhood.
- The snow should be cleared 6 inches below all the caps and 3 to 4 feet around the hydrant. This gives firefighters the space they need to attach hoses and turn on water in case of a fire in your neighborhood. If you are a business owner, please take time to ensure the hydrants in your area are kept clear also.

18. Who is responsible for clearing snow and ice around mailboxes and cluster boxes?

It is the property owner/tenant responsibility to clear snow around their mailbox. If it is a cluster box, it is the responsibility of those residents to clear the snow from around the cluster box. Make sure mail boxes are installed properly to keep them from being damaged by snow plowing equipment. [Mailbox placement diagram](#).

19. Where do I put the snow from parking lots?

Property owners should be aware that the placing, dumping or pushing of snow onto any public street, alley, or public right-of-way is prohibited. (City Ordinance 10-03-04). Parking lot snow, if hauled away, must be dumped on pre-approved private property.

20. Why doesn't the City plow alleys?

Alleys provide access for off-street parking and other public utilities and services, such as garbage collection. The Public Works Waste Department plows the alleys where garbage is collected. If the snow makes garbage collection difficult, the alley will be plowed the day before the garbage is collected.

21. Who removes the snow from sidewalks?

- City Ordinance 10-03-04 requires owners and/or tenants to remove snow and ice from their sidewalk including the crosswalk of corner lots within 24 hours after a snow event has stopped. If it is not removed it may be removed by the City and the cost assessed to the property. To report sidewalk issues, call the City Engineering Department at 701-355-1505 or use a [Citizen Request](#).
- Sidewalks that are the City's responsibility to clear will be done once the streets are cleared of snow.

22. Where do I put my garbage and recycling containers in the winter?

Do not place garbage or recycling containers on snow banks or in the road. Place your containers in your driveway opening to allow collection crews access to your container; this also allows the plows to stay close to the curb.

23. How much does the City spend annually on winter snow and ice control?

2017-2018	\$ 1,072,513
2016-2017	\$ 3,970,692
2015-2016	\$ 780,179
2014-2015	\$ 703,641
2013-2014	\$ 1,045,908
2012-2013	\$ 883,007
2011-2012	\$ 195,096
2010-2011	\$ 1,718,311
2009-2010	\$ 1,291,134
2008-2009	\$ 1,972,337

24. Whom do I contact in cases of Snow Plow Damage?

- Contact the Public Works Department at 701-355-1700. Please note that there are also private snow removal contractors and citizens who drive around with plows on their vehicles. All City snow fighting vehicles are yellow and clearly marked with the City's emblem along with the vehicle number.
- If a mailbox is damaged by City snow removal operations, a Public Works representative will inspect the damage. The City will replace damaged mailboxes with standard issue boxes provided that the original mailbox was placed in compliance with City Regulations and was actually hit by a City vehicle.
- If damage has occurred to the curb or boulevard (i.e. ruts or turf damage) due to snow plowing, staff will follow-up in the spring to assess the damage. When black dirt is available to restore the boulevard (generally not before May 1), the Public Works Department will reseed the damaged area.

If the curb is completely broken and no longer functions to move storm water, Public Works will work in conjunction with City Engineering to replace it through the city concrete replacement project.

25. What can I do to help?

Residents and drivers can help by doing the following:

- Be patient. In heavy snow falls, it takes us longer to get all our streets clear.
- Do not allow children to play or build snow tunnels on snow banks along the road or in cul-de-sacs.
- Keep parked cars off streets wherever possible during the snow storm and while Public Works is plowing.
- Leave room for plows. When you see the yellow flashing lights on the winter maintenance equipment, remain a safe distance behind them. Also, never pass a snow plow. This is an extremely dangerous practice.
- Placing flags at either end of a driveway can help plow drivers see where the driveway begins and ends.
- Stay alert, slow down, and stay in control when driving your vehicle.
- Sump Pumps. This year we have very saturated soils; sumps can be discharged through floor drains this winter which helps prevent unsafe, icy conditions for pedestrians and motorists. When temperatures are above freezing, next spring, direct the sump water outside to a hard surface.