



**DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**  
**Office of Public Relations**

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## **F.A. (S.) Q.s**

### *Frequently Asked (Snow) Questions*

As an aide to public understanding and to solicit the cooperation of motorists and others in conducting effective snow removal operations, DelDOT offers the following list of frequently asked questions and answers.

A continuously updated, interactive map of state road conditions maintained by DelDOT's Traffic Management Center can be viewed at: <http://deldot.gov/traffic/map.ejs>.

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**Question:** Who should I call if I need to travel by automobile due to an emergency situation and I am snowed in?

**Answer:**

Call 911 if there is a life-threatening situation.

However, if you have a non-life-threatening emergency and you need to travel by automobile you may request assistance by calling your county's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). This assistance is only available in extreme weather conditions.

Sussex County Emergency Operations Center: (302) 855-7801

Kent County Emergency Operations Center: (302) 735-3474

New Castle County Emergency Operations Center: (302) 395-2700

Wilmington Emergency Operations Center: (302) 576-3914

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**Question: How may citizens and businesses assist with snow removal?**

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**Answer:** The best way to assist in snow removal operations is to prepare well in advance for winter storms. By stocking up on items you and your family might need, and making other necessary arrangements with employers, family and friends, you should be able to stay safe and warm rather than be on roads exposed to potential hazards.

Keeping roads clear of traffic, reducing the incidence of stranded or stuck vehicles, and minimizing the need for emergency responders, help DelDOT's snow removal teams do their jobs more thoroughly, efficiently and safely.

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**Question: What is a “snow emergency” and what should citizens do if one is declared?**

**Answer:** Technically, Delaware does not declare snow emergencies. However, the state has a three-level systems of driving warnings and restrictions.

The levels are found in Title 20 of the Delaware Code, Subsection 3116(b)(12) and may be put in effect by the Governor during a State of Emergency for all or parts of Delaware based on conditions.

**Below is a summary of the three levels:**

Level 1: Driving Warning: Drivers are discouraged from operating a motor vehicle on the state's roadways, unless there is a significant safety, health or business reason to do so.

Level 2: Driving Restriction: Travel on the roads is restricted to emergency workers, public utilities, healthcare providers including hospital staff, public and private operators of snow removal equipment, private sector food and fuel deliveries, and those industries, companies or organizations that have been provided a waiver, including businesses with pressing continuity and operational issues.

Level 3: Driving Ban: Complete ban on driving except for first responders, utility personnel, and public or private snow removal. Businesses and organizations should adjust work schedules so that employees do not need to be on the roads during a Level 3 Driving Ban.

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**Question: Where does DelDOT get its weather information?**

**Answer:** Primarily, DelDOT utilizes weather forecasts and other weather-related information from the National Weather Service. They provide official forecasts as well as weather updates throughout snow events to DelDOT's snow removal teams and officials at the Delaware Emergency Management Agency (DEMA).

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### **Question: and where does DeIDOT measure snow fall?**

**Answer:** DeIDOT uses 18 different measuring electronic measuring stations throughout the state. These stations are managed by the University of Delaware.

To see a clickable map that provides the latest snow measurements from that system,

visit <http://deldot.gov/public.ejs?command=PublicSnowfallAccumulation>.

The National Weather Service also has snow measuring stations in Delaware. To see those snow totals, visit: <http://www.erh.noaa.gov/phi/>

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### **Question: How does DeIDOT decide when to pre-treat roads in advance of a storm?**

**Answer:** Depending on the severity of the storm that is forecasted, the reliability of the forecast, and the probability of snow in the various parts of the state, DeIDOT may begin pre-treating roads as early as three days before an expected event.

Our goal is to pre-treat primary roads with a base of salt brine before snow or ice have a chance to accumulate. This causes the initial coating of snow and ice to melt and slows down or may even stop the accumulation of ice and snow on the road surface.

This makes the road surface safer for an extended period as snow or ice begin to appear and can make the job of plowing easier in the initial stages.

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### **Question: What does DeIDOT use for pre-treating?**

**Answer:** Typically, DeIDOT uses a salt and water mixture called brine for pre-treating. Unlike straight salt, brine adheres to the road better, and will not be blown away by traffic or high winds.

As the snow begins to fall and accumulate, and throughout a snow event, road salt is used because the salt will adhere to the snow and ice and facilitate melting.

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### **Question: Why can't DeIDOT prevent ice from forming overnight at certain intersections or other trouble spots, and keep snow from drifting back onto roadways?**

**Answer:** When temperatures fall below 20 degrees Fahrenheit, or snow is accumulating rapidly, snow-melting materials are less effective and plowing becomes the primary means of keeping roads passable.

Although busy intersections and other potential trouble spots are attended to, sometimes repeatedly, traffic moving back and forth through these busy areas pack the snow and ice onto the road making removal much more difficult.

Although DeIDOT's crews frequently work long shifts into the late night and early morning hours, roads that freeze and refreeze or snow that falls and then drifts can be extremely difficult to overcome.

While every situation is different, DeIDOT's goal is to provide the public with the safest roads possible given the weather and traffic conditions, as well as the resources at our disposal.

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## **Question: Who decides when to send out snow plows?**

**Answer:** The decision to begin deploying snow plows is made after forecasts are studied and estimates are made as to storm severity and duration, as well as the expected personnel and equipment resources required to do the job.

DeIDOT officials in each county consult with each other and the chief of Maintenance & Operations. Sending crews and equipment out too soon to fight a storm can be as detrimental to a sustained and successful effort as sending out resources too late. Making the right call can be difficult, but it is done with the best available information at the time of the event.

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## **Question: How much snow has to fall before DeIDOT plows?**

**Answer:** DeIDOT does not decide to begin plowing based on the amount of snow on the roads. The decision is made based on a variety of predictive and observed factors, including pre-treatment efforts, weather forecasts, field reports of changing weather conditions in different areas of the state and resources required for the event.

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## **Question: How does DeIDOT decide which roads to plow first?**

**Answer:** DeIDOT assigns priority levels to each road, taking into account the amount of traffic it typically carries, population density in the surrounding areas and how crucial it is to functioning of the overall road system.

To learn where your road is classified, please visit the following website, which has links to maps of each county:

[http://deldot.gov/information/pubs\\_forms/func\\_maps/pdf/functional\\_classification.pdf](http://deldot.gov/information/pubs_forms/func_maps/pdf/functional_classification.pdf)

Roads are typically assigned to one of three major categories:

### **Primary Roads**, also known as Arterial Routes and/or Expressways

Definition: Multi-lane highways, and some two-lane roads designed to carry heavy traffic volumes between major destinations.

Examples:

- New Castle County, Interstate 95
- Kent County, Route 13
- Sussex County, Route 404
- All transit routes throughout the state are also considered primary routes. This provides citizens with alternatives to driving during snow and ice storms.

### **Secondary Roads**, also known as Collector Routes

Definition: These roads receive less traffic than primary roads, but are the main feeder routes to the primary roads.

Examples:

- In New Castle County, some primary roads are Route 9, Route 71 and Red Lion Road.
- In Kent County, an example of a primary road is Hazletville Road.
- In Sussex County, some primary roads are Route 24, Route 16 and Cave Neck Road.

### **Local Roads**

Definition: Roads that are used to travel to and from less densely populated residential or agricultural areas, used primarily by those who live along them.

- These roads frequently have three-number designations.
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**Question: Why does DelDOT *not* plow some streets?**

**Answer:** While DelDOT is responsible for maintenance of 89 percent of roads in the state, the agency does not plow roads and streets that are maintained by towns or cities. DelDOT also does not plow roads within privately owned subdivisions. DelDOT does plow some roads that are within city or town limits, but only those that are designated state maintained roads. Residents of incorporated towns or cities should first check with local government officials to learn if your street or road is municipally maintained.

For example, in the town of Greenwood, DelDOT plows Market Street, because that road is part of Route 16, which is a major route for motorists heading east and west in Sussex County. In Dover, DelDOT plows North and South Dupont Highways for the same reason.

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**Question: Is there a program by DelDOT that helps pay for plowing in subdivisions?**

**Answer:** DelDOT does not plow privately-owned and maintained subdivisions. However, if a subdivision has state-maintained roads, those communities can sign up to be part of a DelDOT program that reimburses those communities for a major portion of the cost to hire a private contractor for snow removal.

For more information on this program, please visit the web page at:

[http://deldot.gov/information/community\\_programs\\_and\\_services/snow/index.shtml](http://deldot.gov/information/community_programs_and_services/snow/index.shtml)

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**Question: What does it mean that a road is “passable,” or “cleared?”**

**Answer:** Passable means that a road can be driven upon by most vehicles, but the road may still be snow and ice covered. If motorists drive very slowly and carefully, they can be traveled on.

The shoulders of the road, turn lanes and crossovers are likely not plowed if a road is classified as passable.

Cleared means a road is almost entirely free of snow or ice. There might still be a spot of snow or ice that has re-formed, but for the most part, cleared roads are capable of supporting normal traffic speeds.

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**Question: Do snow plow drivers receive special training?**

**Answer:** Yes. In addition to maintaining a Commercial Driver’s License, our operators are certified in the operation of many types of equipment. Snow plow drivers spend many hours honing skills that are specific to plowing snow.

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**Question: Does DelDOT use independent contractors to help with snow removal?**

**Answer:** DelDOT uses contractors, such as landscaping companies, large roadway contractors and many local farmers to assist with snow removal. Contractors are an essential part of DelDOT's snow-removal efforts. Because hiring contractors costs the state money, DelDOT must balance the use of contractors with the existing capabilities of DelDOT personnel and equipment already paid for by taxpayers.

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**Question: Why do snow plow drivers sometimes seem to drive faster than is safe considering the road conditions?**

**Answer:** Snow removal operations must proceed as quickly and safely as possible in order to plow as many miles of road as possible in a limited amount of time. DelDOT is responsible for more than 12,000 lane-miles of roads, or 89 percent of all roads in Delaware. Drivers are trained to operate their equipment at safe speeds that will result in an effective snow removal effort over a large area.

If you feel a vehicle is being driven in a reckless or unsafe manner, please contact DelDOT's Office of Public Relations at (302) 760-2080 with detailed information about the specific situation.

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**Question: Why are snow plows or other DelDOT vehicles sometimes parked at local businesses or on the side of the road during a storm?**

**Answer:** As they perform their snow removal duties, DelDOT's crews must necessarily stop for bathroom, meal and occasional rest breaks. During snow events, DelDOT crews frequently work long shifts into the late night or early morning hours. Driving large, heavy vehicles under adverse road conditions requires intense concentration and can be physically and mentally exhausting. If drivers stop their vehicles on the roadside or are parked at a local business, be assured the break they are taking is richly deserved.

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**Question: Why do some trucks ride with their plows up?**

**Answer:** Trucks are assigned to plow specific roads, and they must travel quickly, but safely, over a primary or other road to get to the next assigned area. With their plows down, trucks move more slowly, and may need to stop at each crossroad. In addition, if a road has been recently salted, driving with the plow down may remove the salt that has been applied to help melt the snow or ice.

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**Question: Does DelDOT use snow fences to help prevent drifting snow?**

**Answer:** DelDOT stopped deploying snow fences approximately 15 years ago because the various costs associated with erecting, removing and maintaining fences far exceeded their effectiveness in Delaware, and these resources could be better utilized in other pressing maintenance operations. Extensive snow fencing is expensive and requires many personnel and hours to install. Depending on wind direction – which can vary widely in Delaware - snow fences can be either helpful or a detriment in controlling drifting. In the wrong conditions they can cause snow to accumulate on the wrong side of the fence and onto the road surface.

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**Question:** How much money does DeIDOT spend on snow removal?

**Answer:** That number varies from one year to the next. While DeIDOT makes financial projections based on experiences during prior years, this number can be exceeded if there is a winter with a lot of snow fall.

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**Question:** How much does DeIDOT spend on average per inch of snow?

**Answer:** Placing an average per inch cost on snow removal is a meaningless exercise. There is no way to accurately place a per-inch average cost on snow removal because each snow event is unique and has different challenges. For example, one snow event could have a lot of ice and require many personnel hours and tons of salt with very little snow accumulation. There could be an event with a lot of snow, but minimal drifting and a rapid return to higher temperatures that cause it to melt away rapidly. Another event can have the same amount of snow, but temperatures remain freezing for days, and winds continue to create drifts, driving up snow removal costs.

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**Question:** How does Delaware compare to other states in snow removal operations?

**Answer:** Each state and region faces unique weather, geography, traffic and resource challenges. The goal of a successful state snow removal operation is to gauge the conditions they are most likely to encounter from year to year and to put enough primary resources of personnel and equipment into place to act quickly and effectively when called upon. These resources need to be augmented by contingency plans that can be utilized if an especially severe, protracted or repeated situation occurs that might overwhelm the primary resources at the state's disposal.

Despite decades of experience and training, and the assistance of the National Weather Service, the entire snow removal process in every state comes down to dedicated and skillful people making the best decisions they can given the information and resources they have at their command.

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**Question:** If my mailbox or other property is damaged by a snow plow, what should I do?

**Answer:** DeIDOT takes every reasonable precaution to minimize or prevent any damage to public or private property during any of its operations. However, if your property was damaged, please call the Delaware insurance coverage office at 1-877-277-4185 or email [InsCov@state.de.us](mailto:InsCov@state.de.us).