

Yankton County Highway Department

Snow Plowing FAQ

Here are answers to the most commonly asked snow plowing and winter road condition questions.

Who is responsible for my road?

Although located in Yankton County, not all roads are maintained by the Yankton County Highway Department. Organized Townships are responsible for their own roads.

How many vehicles and personnel are involved in snow removal?

Currently, there are 16 employees dedicated to snow removal during a snow event. Yankton County is responsible for 252.9 miles of asphalt roads and 67.7 miles of gravel roads. These are our primary roads and as such will be worked on first. Yankton County is also responsible for 184.5 miles of Unorganized Township roads. There are 6 motor graders, 8 plow trucks and 1 pickup truck with a plow that are used for snow removal. We currently have 16 snow removal routes. It takes approximately 4 hours for a truck to run one complete round on each route. The Highway Department averages 10-12 hours per day for snow removal. The hours are determined by the severity of the snow event.

Why is there a snow plow parked somewhere instead of plowing?

Our operators work long hours during a snow event. Due to the complexity and stress of the job, our drivers are required to take periodic breaks to ensure their safety and that of the public. Working for long periods of time without a break can be hazardous for everyone.

What can I do to support the County's plowing effort?

During a snow event, it is always recommended to travel ONLY if necessary. If you must travel, check conditions in advance through www.safetravelusa.com/sd and always allow extra time to arrive at your destination. Always let someone close to you know when you will be traveling, your expected ETA, your route and let them know when you arrive at your destination.

Yankton County Highway Department

Can Yankton County tow my car out of the ditch?

Unfortunately, Yankton County cannot be responsible for pulling your car from the ditch. Doing so could cause damage to county equipment or to your personal vehicle. Our operators are equipped with radios and have the ability to report an accident or situation to emergency personnel.

Why are gravel roads sometimes left unplowed?

Gravel roads are secondary to paved roads. We will get the gravel roads cleared as soon as possible.

Why can't you plow my road now?

We wish we had enough snowplows and drivers to take care of every road right away, but resources are limited and so we must adhere to a carefully laid out system for clearing the roads. If we allowed our plows to be diverted each time a special request was made, our system would not be effective and it would take longer to get all of the roads cleared. To keep snow removal operations effective and efficient, plows are not permitted to deviate from their assigned routes.

Can you tell me exactly when my road will be plowed?

Each snowplow has an assigned route. Hours are adjusted accordingly to the significance of the weather event. As weather conditions change, we may need to alter the routes in the midst of operations in order to control drifting snow, ice or other special problems. We cannot give you an estimate of when your road will be cleared due to changing weather conditions.

Why don't the trucks plow and salt on the way to their routes?

Each snowplow has an assigned route. If the trucks spread salt on their way to their destination, then they wouldn't have enough to spread along their own route. Plowing along the way would mean it would take much longer until the truck reaches its assigned route.

Yankton County Highway Department

Why do you sometimes salt instead of plow or plow instead of salt?

Different types of storm require the use of different techniques. The decision of whether to salt or plow depends on the predicted weather conditions. For example, if the temperature is below 20 degrees and not expected to rise, salt will not be effective. If the sun is shining and the temperature is 20 degrees or more and expected to remain steady or to rise, then salt will be more effective. The decision whether to plow or salt is made with great consideration and based on the latest weather information available. Plowing under the wrong conditions can create a polished road surface, resulting in dangerous glare ice. High winds can cause a precarious situation. Adding salt/sand to drifting conditions can seriously increase the buildup of snow and dice on a roadway making it more treacherous. At times, the best action would be to limit the amount of salt/sand as to prevent heavy drifting and snow/ice buildup. The decisions made by experienced crew and supervisory personnel are critical under these conditions.

I have a medical condition. Can you plow my road in case there is an emergency and an ambulance needs to get through?

The potential for a medical emergency does not warrant priority treatment. Anyone needing an ambulance in a medical emergency should dial 911 and all necessary steps will be coordinated to get emergency personnel to you.

When I called the Highway Department to find out about conditions, the line was busy or there was no answer.

During a severe weather event, our department is understandable very busy. We advise limiting your travel, or staying off of the roads entirely. Check your television or radio for local weather and road conditions. Check with www.safetravelusa.com/sd for more detailed road conditions. Our office personnel will not have the latest road conditions. Our phone lines should only be used primarily to alert us of a special problem relating to the snow removal operations during a severe weather event.

Why does the plow roll through a stop sign?

Yankton County plows are considered emergency vehicles. A plow may continue slowly and cautiously through a stop sign depending on how much snow is being pushed as they are unable to get moving again if they are plowing a heavy snowfall. As always, safety is our number one concern. Please allow extra room to back up if necessary to resume plowing when traffic has cleared a busy intersection.

Yankton County Highway Department

Why is the plow moving so slowly?

There are several reasons that the plows operate at slower speeds. At slower speeds, the plow operator is able to clear the lanes more effectively. During a snow event, our plow operators are monitoring several different conditions at one time. The operator is attempting to try to clear as closely to the center line as possible and may occasionally cross the center line due to decreased visibility. This leaves a very slim margin of error. The operator must also pay attention to the need to distribute sand/salt as needed as well as monitor oncoming traffic, mailboxes, and other obstacles that may come up. The operator is required to do this during a time of severely reduced visibility.

Why is the operator blocking intersections and roads to clear snow?

At times, road conditions warrant the use of sand, but can actually make driving conditions more hazardous later. During and after a weather event, sand, wind and increased traffic flow can exacerbate snow and ice buildup by packing it down to the point that a plow is no longer effective. This can be a very dangerous situation for traffic. The highway department then has no choice but to use large equipment to remove snow and ice buildup to improve the condition of a road. At times, it is absolutely necessary to temporarily block intersections and roads for cleaning to ensure the safety of the public. These roads are only blocked or slowed for long enough to get them cleared. It is always a good idea to allow extra time when traveling so that you can adjust for changing road conditions and cleanup efforts after an event.

When would Yankton County pull their plows off the roads?

We would pull our plows off the road when the SD DOT issues a No Travel Advisory.