

Planning helps Boone fight snow

Written by

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BOONE COUNTY - As temperatures soar above average this week, it's easy for thoughts to turn to spring, especially after such a harsh winter.

Ravaged salt supplies and potholes on local roads, however, are reminders of the impact Mother Nature has had in the region.

In Boone County, an abundance of planning in the last few years has allowed the county to sidestep weather-related problems that have plagued other communities throughout the country this season.

The county has spread plenty of salt - about 9,000 tons according to County Engineer Greg Sketch - around 250 square miles of roads since the season's first major storm hit in early December. The county budget also will take a hit, as overtime pay, maintenance and the purchase of additional salt will far exceed the estimated \$400,000 allotted for snow removal.

"We'll probably transfer at least \$150,000 this year," Sketch said.

In May, the Fiscal Court approved the purchase of enough salt to fill the county storage facilities to the capacity of 5,500 tons. The contract with Cargill Inc.-Deicing Technology also included assurances that the county could purchase additional salt at a fixed price, if needed during the winter. That provision proved extremely beneficial as some salt suppliers struggled to meet the demands brought on by the harsh winter.

"It really adds to the comfort level to know you have access to additional supplies," Sketch said.

The county has the option to renew the contract for the next three years at an average increase of \$2 per ton and Sketch said it almost certainly will do that.

The county also includes a 10 percent reserve for unexpected expenses in the public works department budget, which will lessen the impact of the added costs this year.

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The county also added a new salt dome and two additional tandem trucks in 2009 to provide better coverage countywide. The ability to reload trucks at three sites throughout the county allowed drivers to continually retreat roads during the extended snowfalls this winter.

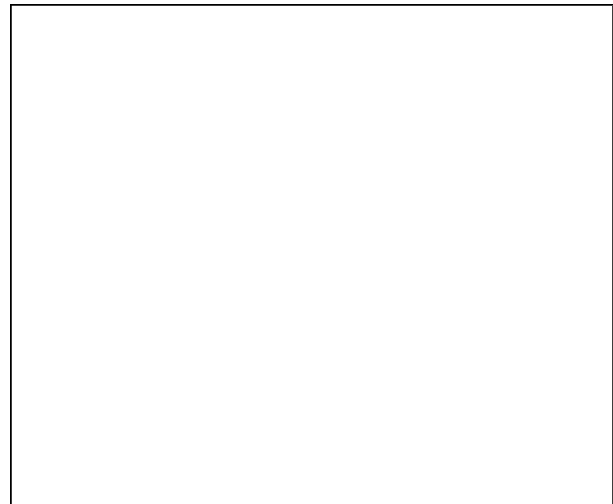
The county does not like to preload trucks, because the added weight puts an additional strain on vehicles, but an increase in storage space allows for that option if a major storm were anticipated.

Sketch said the county also is looking to add a conveyor to further increase efficiency at the salt dome.

While temperatures will flirt with 70 degrees this week, longtime residents know that does not necessarily mean winter is over.

Sketch says if a late-season storm hits, the county has plenty of salt on hand and will continue to use whatever resources are necessary to keep roads clear.

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