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# Oakland 'in desperate shape' Cleanup tough without salt

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Wayne and Oakland Road Commission crews battled the first 36 hours of the "Great Midwest Blizzard" in vain. Rain followed by snow followed by frigid gusts of wind kept road crews from making any significant progress until Friday afternoon.

Through the first 36 hours of the storm, 200 road crews took to the major streets and highways with plows only.

**'There was ice building up on the snow-plow blades, and it was lifting the plows right up off their drive wheels.'**

—Oakland County Road Commission

Spokesmen said salt, which is in short supply throughout the tri-county area, would have been ineffective until crews were able to clear away most of the snow which blanketed the road surfaces. Blowing and drifting snow made that task nearly impossible.

"WE HAD TO rescue our own trucks in western Wayne County," said Louis Sugo, a spokesman for the Wayne County Road Commission.

"They were just running into some whopper drifts," he said. "A couple of trucks got stuck in drifts which came up to their fenders."

Snow plows in Oakland County ran into the same problems and a new one with a different twist. "There was ice building up on the blades and it was lifting the plows right up off their drive wheels," said Dennis Pajot, a spokesman for the Oakland County Road Commission.

ROAD SALT, a precious commodity in Snow Belt states, is in short supply in both Wayne and County Counties. Wayne County has only 4,000 tons in reserve and Oakland County is in more desperate shape—it has only 2,000 tons left.

"We don't have any salt," Pajot said. "Once you start salting you have to keep going."

"The storm on the ninth (Jan. 9) took everything we had. We just haven't been able to recover," he said. One average salting run would consume about 35 tons, he said. At that rate, Oakland County crews could

make only four complete runs. "Face it, we're in pretty desperate shape," Pajot said.

The Oakland County Road Commission has been unable to get regular salt deliveries since the beginning of the month, Pajot said. Oakland County's major salt suppliers are Morton Salt of Canada and International Salt of Detroit.

Sugo said Wayne County road crews had only enough salt for three complete rounds, even though suppliers are still making deliveries.

"There aren't any of those mountainous piles of salt anywhere in Wayne County," Sugo said. Salt, he said, is being delivered by barge from Canada and is being loaded directly into trucks.

Ice flows on the Detroit River compounded road commission headaches. According to Sugo, the Coast Guard had to be called out to free a number of barges which were stuck in the ice.

MOREOVER, new deliveries were not keeping pace with consumption. Sugo said the imbalance would keep road crews from doing a complete salting.

"We get about 600 tons on a regular delivery. But we use between 1,200 and 1,500 tons on an average salt run," he said.

Sugo said road crews fell back to salting just freeways, hills, intersections, railroad crossings and curves.

While road crews had to contend with the usual problems of drifting snow and stalled cars, Wayne County road crews were called on to escort a fleet of Detroit Edison Co. fuel carriers to the county line.

Detroit Edison drivers reportedly refused to haul the needed fuel to the Monroe Edison plant unless they had the road crews' escort. At the Wayne-Monroe County boundary, the fuel carriers were met by a convoy of Monroe County snowplows which got them through to the Monroe plant.

1-75 from Gibraltar to the Ohio state line was closed throughout Thursday and much of Friday.

OAKLAND COUNTY averages 34,000 tons of salt each winter, said John Grubba, managing director of the road commission.

County crews can spread up to 278 tons of salt per hour on 1,391 miles of critical and priority routes and the state trunkline system.

"The cost of salt alone can run as high as \$3,157 per hour. Add to that the cost of equipment and crews, and costs can run as high as \$5,185 per hour during regular working hours," Grubba said. Overtime can push the cost to more than \$6,500.

The road commission can put up to 83 salt trucks on the road and, in the case of plowing, can muster up 135 pieces of equipment.

"All out salting requires 95 workers, counting supervisory and loading employees. All out plowing requires 147," Grubba said.

He explained that the road commission policy is to salt until one inch of snow accumulates; then plow and resalt critical and pr priority routes as are needed. 00 ? B0 0

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A total of 2,872 miles of county and state trunkline roads require maintenance, but only half are manned during holidays and overtime periods.

The "critical" routes total 393.3 miles of state and county roads which are traveled by more than 40,000 vehicles per day. "These are manned at the forecast of snow or bad conditions," Grubba said.

Nearly 800 miles of "priority I" routes are manned when snow begins, he said. Crews on these roads try to achieve at least clear wheel tracks.

"Priority II" routes, which include most of the through roads in the northern half of the county, are manned "variously according to conditions," Grubba said.

"Other roads are manned only on regular time, and in most instances, subdivision streets can't be reached until two or three days after the brunt of the storm," he said.

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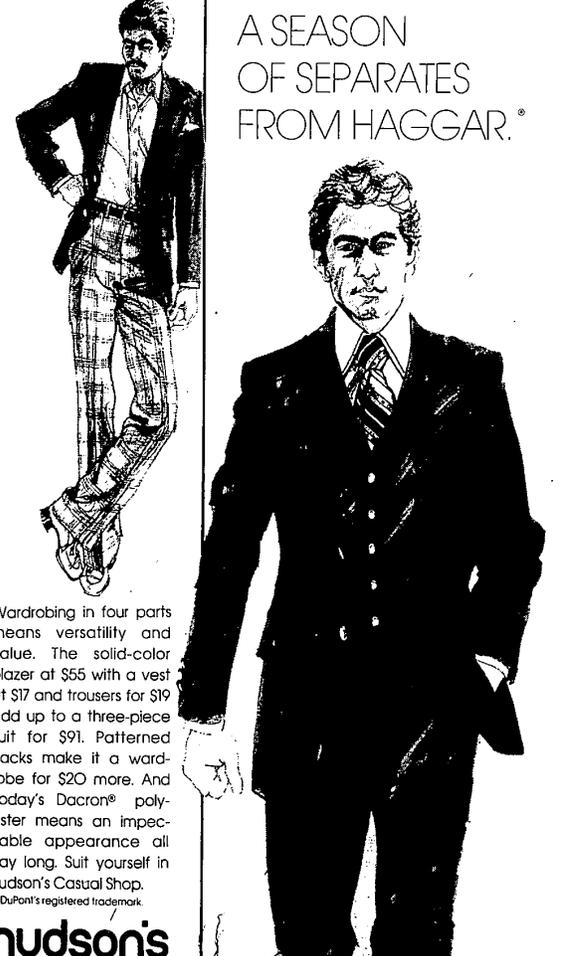
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