

Staff photos by Randy Borst

# Winterwatch

## Road departments, schools gird for showdown with Jack Frost

**I**T'S BEGINNING look a lot like winter. We've had traces of snowfall, plunging temperatures and icy roads already this year. And despite this week's mild weather, winter's around the corner as sure as Santa's re-decorating his dozen reindeer.

Forecasters are calling for a milder winter than the one we froze through last year, but Farmington and Farmington Hills officials are preparing for the worst.

A two-man, two-truck crew is the normal complement for winter road maintenance in Farmington, but city Department of Public Services chief Earl Billing said that his office could put 14 men and vehicles on the streets at a moment's notice. The city's \$50,000-road-maintenance budget allows for hiring added contractors in case outside help is needed to clear streets in a snow emergency.

"In Farmington we have a reputation for clearing streets as fast as we can," Billing said. "Farm-

ington has the honor of having its streets cleared first of any city in the area."

Billing said the city has already stockpiled as much salt as it can, 300 tons, but that 850 tons of salt is used in a normal year. Last year some 1,000 tons of salt was used on city streets.

Major roads such as Grand River and Farmington Road receive top priority when it comes to plowing snow and spreading salt. "They get first priority," Billing said, "and then we move into the subdivisions." He said that "residents are required by ordinance to maintain the sidewalks in front of their own houses, just as the city maintains the sidewalks in front of its facilities."

Procedures in Farmington Hills are similar, according to that city's public works director, Walt Karolak.

"If there's enough snow to plow, we plow (the major roads)," Karolak said. But the Hills usually waits until five or six inches of snow has accumu-

lated in the subdivisions before tackling those streets.

Karolak said the Hills has budgeted \$280,000 for snow and ice removal this winter. Approximately 3,700 tons of salt fell on Hills' streets last year.

LEWIS SCHULMAN, superintendent of Farmington schools, said his office has prepared many responses to potential snow emergencies.

"I would make the final decision on the closure of schools based on reports from others in the office," Schulman said.

For instance, in a possible snow emergency, the bus drivers would send out a safety inspector to report on the condition of area roads.

Schulman said that his goal would be to make a decision on whether schools should be closed "by 5 in the morning based, not only on the weather situation at that time, but on the forecast, condition of parking lots, whether teachers can leave their homes and get to work."

"We would urge parents to listen to their radios (for news of school closings) and not to call the schools," Schulman said.

Farmington schools cooperate with the Law Enforcement Information Network, a communications system which sends word of school closings to several major radio stations in the area.

In case of a severe snowfall during the school day, Schulman said, "sometimes it's more secure, safe for youngsters to remain in school until the end of the day."

"In case they (students) cannot be picked up, we house them until parents can come, and principals have been known to give lifts," the superintendent said.

### Tune car and yourself for rugged winter driving

When it comes to getting your car ready for winter, your know-how and a dependable mechanic make the big difference.

Winter's cooler days and colder nights mean more driving with car windows closed. Since carbon monoxide is an odorless killer that can seep into a closed car, police suggest motorists get an exhaust system check-up to protect themselves and their families.

This kind of check, police advise, should be made by a competent mechanic. Other types of fanbelt-to-tailpipe winterizing checks also are recommended.

These checks are endorsed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the National Safety Council's committee on winter driving hazards.

Motorists need equal braking on all wheels to avoid skidding on slick roads, police advise. Drivers should have their brakes checked and relined if necessary.

**GOOD TIRES** with good tread are

important all year, but especially on snowy and icy pavements, police say. Snow tires provide added pulling power in loosely packed snow. Radial tires may or may not improve traction on snow.

A tune-up is important for dependable starts on cold mornings.

Police officers also advise drivers to have their mechanics check timing, plugs, batteries, electrical and heater-defroster systems and anti-freeze and windshield washer fluids.

Police suggest that drivers make sure all vehicle lights are working and that lenses are kept clean. Good lighting is critical when winter reduces visibility and increases stopping distances.

Safety gear in trunks should include booster cables, tire chains in good repair, sand, rock salt, a traction mat, a shovel, safety flares or reflectors, extra windshield washer solvent, a window scraper and paper towels, heavy gloves, extra winter clothing and a tow chain, cable or strap.

## Interchange that claimed life again scene of icy mishaps

For the second time in two weeks the area around the I-695 and I-275 interchange was the scene of a slippery series of pile-ups.

State troopers were sent out early Sunday morning in response to 17 car crashes and one pedestrian injury.

The interchange was closed Nov. 13 for half a day when a 17-car pile-up claimed the life of 26-year-old Karen Chiebek of Livonia and clogged the ramp leading to southbound I-275.

Like the earlier accident, Sunday's crashes were attributed to icy conditions caused by freezing rain hitting the cold overpasses.

"I went sliding down the ramp myself on foot," said Trooper Larry Richardson, who spent a busy morning policing two different accident sites in the area. "It was like you were skating."

Richardson said he spotted a number of cars that had slid into the ditch when he was driving on an accident on I-96 west of Novi Road, where a car collided with a Greyhound bus carrying 40 persons.

In that accident, which occurred at 7:53 a.m., Caferino Martin, 46, of West Bloomfield struck the bus when he lost control of his Lincoln on an icy railroad overpass. Martin's car spun out of control, hitting the bus, driven by Ronald Smith, 36, of Taylor, in the side door.

As a motorist who wasn't involved in the accident placed flares on the expressway, Richardson said Jodie Wood, 26, of Lansing came over the crest of a hill in her car, saw the flares and turned, striking Martin as he stood in front of his car.

WOOD'S CAR ended up in a ditch, and Martin was taken to Botsford Hospital, where he is listed in stable to critical condition.

The accident remains under investigation, but no ticket has been issued yet, said Richardson.

At 8:15 a.m. troopers responded to a five-car pile-up on the ramp leading from westbound I-695 to southbound I-275. The pile-up started when Christine H. O'Sullivan, 32, of Sterling Heights lost control of her car and struck a guardrail, police said.

Gino A. Corrado, 27, of Plainview, N.Y., driving behind O'Sullivan, couldn't stop and hit the rear of her car. Driving behind O'Sullivan and Corrado, Sandra Sue Holington, 27, of Bloomfield Hills swerved to miss the cars but lost control and struck the guardrail in front of the two cars.

David K. Efron, 30, of Huntington Woods slammed into the back of Corrado's car, police said.

As the four cars rested on the left side of the ramp Mary C. Brosnan, 24, of Redford Township managed to squeeze right to avoid them but hit a guardrail and spun around and ended up in front of the four cars, said Trooper Mark Schoenich.

NONE OF THE four were injured enough to seek medical treatment, according to the trooper.

Minutes later on the ramp leading from northbound I-275 to westbound I-96, Lori O'Neill, 17, of Farmington Hills lost control of her car and hit a guardrail, police said. An ambulance driven by Jack Jeffrey, 20, of Taylor was sent to the site.

Frank Novel, 40, of Dearborn Heights, saw the ambulance and slowed down, according to Trooper Richardson, when his car was struck in the rear by a vehicle driven by Lawson Bass, 41, of Milford.

When the ambulance driver parked to check on the condition of Novel and Bass, his ambulance slid down the incline and hit Novel's car, Richardson said.

Then Marguerite Mellon, 21, of Livonia came along, and her car slid into the ambulance and a guardrail. Another car, driven by Gregory Kemp, 32, of Milford also hit the emergency vehicle.

A pedestrian saw the pile-up and started pushing the disabled cars out of the highway when Donna Coniglio, 21, of Detroit crashed her car into the pile, police said. Her car was then hit by another driver by David Charles, 46, of Detroit, according to state police reports. Still another car crashed before the mess ended. The driver drove off before troopers could get his name.

Decker was treated for a sprained left knee at Providence Hospital annex in Livonia.

THE BULK of problems in slippery weather is occurring on the ramp from westbound I-695 to southbound I-275, according to Lt. Thomas Garvale, director of traffic services in metropolitan Detroit for the Michigan State Police.

The overpass is the highest level of three decks: I-275, M-102 and the surface highway which turns into westbound I-96 leading to Lansing.

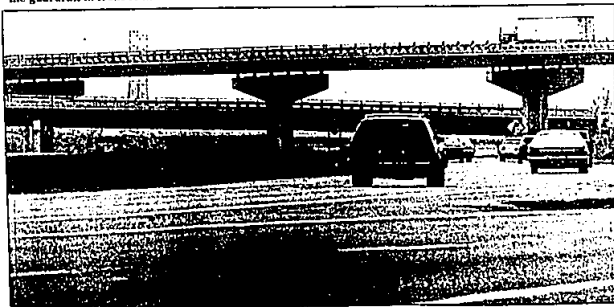
Signs warning drivers that the bridge lies up before the surface roadway too often are ignored, he said.

"As I understand it, most of these people were well into the ice and snow zone before they could react to the accidents," Garvale said.

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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

The view is of westbound traffic heading under the I-275 overpass, an interchange that was the scene of a traffic fatality two

weeks ago and more auto mishaps this week.

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