

INFORMATION RELEASE



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AHTD RESPONDS TO CRITICISM OVER ROAD CONDITIONS DURING RECENT WINTER STORM

LITTLE ROCK (12-18) – The recent early December winter storm had a major impact on the State of Arkansas. A combination of freezing rain, sleet, and snow made travel difficult on many of our State’s highways, especially in the north. This prompted questions from citizens, elected officials, and the news media about the effectiveness of the State’s snow and ice removal efforts. Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) Director Scott Bennett provides the following analysis of the agency’s efforts.

“We did not achieve desirable or even acceptable results in some areas as our crews worked to clear highways during the recent winter storm,” Bennett said. “We are aware of and frustrated by the unsatisfactory conditions that persisted too long in some areas. We also know situations like this create perceptions that can only be addressed by improving the results we achieve, and that’s what we intend to do.”

The poor results in some areas were not due to a lack of effort, Bennett noted. “While it is fair to criticize the results that we obtained, it is not fair to criticize the effort put forth by our employees. Our crews worked around-the-clock fighting this storm, even during time when they would normally have been home with their families. They are frustrated as well, but I am very proud of their dedication and hard work,” Bennett added.

“What we must do as an agency is to make sure we provide our crews with the proper tools to address these storms,” he continued. “We are a southern state – we will never have the amount of dedicated snow and ice fighting equipment as our neighbors to the north – but we must make sure we utilize the resources we do have available to the best of our ability.”

The AHTD recently adopted new methods and invested in new equipment to address winter storms. “Through the years, we have routinely communicated with our neighboring states, mainly Missouri, to share best practices,” Bennett said. “Based on those discussions, we began using beet juice as a salt additive in recent years in north Arkansas to pre-treat roads and bridges prior to the arrival of storms. And just this year, we invested in the equipment to make, store, and spread salt brine before and during storms. That’s also a tactic we learned from Missouri. Unfortunately, even those methods did not fare well with the ice accumulations we experienced during the recent storm.”

Bennett noted that the AHTD has recently purchased new trucks that utilize what is known as a 'belly plow' for use in Arkansas's most northern counties. The new trucks are larger and heavier and have a plow blade mounted under the body of the truck, between the front and rear axles. The weight of the truck allows downward pressure to be placed on the blade, making it more effective in battling ice. The first new truck was received during the recent storm, and two more were received last week. Three more trucks are ordered and should be arriving soon. He said the Department is very encouraged by the results seen from the first truck in its initial limited use.

The AHTD has also purchased a 'tow plow' that it plans to use on Interstates 40 and 540 in west and northwest Arkansas. The Department is awaiting delivery of the truck that is needed to pull the plow, but the apparatus will allow the AHTD to plow multiple travel lanes in a single pass. It should be operational around the first of the year.

Bennett said Arkansas appreciates the cooperation it receives from states like Missouri. "They have shared information with us in the past, and we look forward to working with them in the aftermath of this storm," he said. "What we know from visiting with them about this storm is that they did not have the ice accumulations that we had in Arkansas, and they were able to move additional personnel and equipment from other parts of their state to southern Missouri for this event because only a relatively small part of their state was affected. We in Arkansas were not able to move resources from one area to another for this storm because all 75 counties in Arkansas were under some type of winter weather warning or advisory prior to its onset.

"Our goal moving forward is to achieve better results when addressing winter weather conditions on our State highways," he concluded. "Every storm is different and provides unique challenges, and no state is 100 percent successful all the time. But our most recent results were unacceptable in some areas, and we know we must do a better job for our citizens."

