

Making preparations for winter

As the nights draw in, the bitter cold chills and our thoughts turn to the end of another year. For those who work in the industry, the focus is on keeping customers satisfied and the network flowing through snow, hail, wind and rain

Highways England and our partners work around the clock to keep our motorways and major A roads as clear as they can possibly be.

Here are some facts and figures on the massive effort we are making to keep the public on the move through fair and foul winter weather.

Salt stocks

- Highways England has in excess of 280,000 tonnes of salt across its depots with further deliveries being made by suppliers over the coming weeks and months to keep people and businesses moving.
- When exceptionally low temperatures are forecast, drivers should take extra care because of the risk of ice forming on road surfaces. While salt is very effective at reducing the risk of ice formation, at very low temperatures there can still be a risk of ice on road surfaces even when salt has been spread.

Winter fleet

- Together with our contractors, we have a fleet of over 500 specialised winter service vehicles (including salt spreaders, referred to by most as 'gritters').
- 437 of the vehicles are provided directly by us and are all equipped with data logging systems, including GPS location information and route guidance.
- We have access to over 1,200 trained drivers available during the winter period.
- All of the salt spreaders can be fitted with snowploughs and we have 100 depots across the country, allowing them to access all parts of the strategic road network quickly.

National salt reserves

- Since 2010, Highways England has managed a national salt reserve of more than 380,000 tonnes, which has substantially increased the stocks available if demand increases because of bad weather.
- The salt reserve is available for use by local authorities as well as Highways England and is used as a last resort in the event supplies are unable to meet demand, and plays a key role in keeping vehicles moving in extreme weather.
- This reserve is in addition to the salt suppliers' own stockpiles and production capabilities.

Severe weather plans

- As part of an annual improvement process, our severe weather plans have been updated to capture lessons learnt from previous seasons including changes to alternative routes in the event of a road closure.

Prevention...

- We treat our network before road surface temperatures fall below freezing.

In severe weather, winter service can operate continuously around the clock.

- An average route length for treatment is typically in the region of 50 to 80 miles (80 to 130km) in length.
- This mileage would normally include 'free running' when the vehicle is not actually salting the road.
- Spreaders are limited to 40mph when treating the roads.

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Winter advice for road users

- Check your vehicle – fuel and fluid levels, electrics and tyres – before setting out.
- Be prepared with an emergency kit in your vehicle, including ice-scraper, de-icer, warm clothes and blankets, torch, boots, first aid kit, jump leads, a spade, a road atlas and sunglasses (for the winter glare).
- Plan your journeys. Check weather and travel conditions before and during your journey.
- If the weather is very severe, consider whether your journey is essential or travel at a different time. In winter, the weather can change quickly so always be prepared for bad weather.
- Remember that even when roads have been treated with salt, ice can still form, particularly on bends or under overhanging trees. ☹

