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## Winter Maintenance and Operation of Highways

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### Advice Note from Department for Transport

1. This note gives advice to English local authorities on the maintenance and operation of highways during the coming winter of 2005/06. The Secretary of State urges all of them to make suitable preparations for what could be a much more severe winter than those experienced in recent years.

### Winter Weather Forecast

1. The Meteorological Office has made a long range forecast that this winter has a 65% probability of being harder than normal, with the strong possibility of a prolonged cold spell from December through to the end of February. It is foreseen as being a central European type of winter with a higher than normal proportion of easterly weather flows bringing lower than average precipitation. For the main it would be colder than average but also drier. However, the Meteorological Office also expected that there would inevitably be brief incursions by westerly weather systems from time to time, and when these came up against the cold air established over Britain they would be more likely to deliver snow instead of rain. And that snow might linger for longer because the colder easterly weather system could be expected to re-establish itself before the normal melt set in.

### Duty to Clear Ice and Snow and Code of Practice

1. Highway authorities in England have a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice (Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003). The term "highway" includes carriageways, footways and cycleways. What is reasonably practicable is ultimately a matter for the courts. However, the Department of Transport strongly recommends that local highway authorities plan and carry out winter maintenance in accordance with Section 13 of *Well-maintained Highways: Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management* published by the UK Roads Liaison Group in July this year. This is available electronically at [www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org](http://www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org) or in hard copy from The Stationery Office. Amongst other things, this recommends that local authorities develop a winter service operational plan in consultation with users and stakeholders; publish and implement it; and review it annually.

## **Salt Supplies**

1. A crucial factor in treating roads in winter is the availability of adequate salt supplies for preventing the formation of ice. It will be important this winter that sufficient supplies are available to treat prolonged icy conditions and that these are delivered in good time for use. Conditions and needs will vary from authority to authority and across the country, but as a rough and ready rule of thumb the Department considers that authorities should plan for sufficient salt to tackle conditions equivalent to the worst winter that they have experienced in the past decade. What we all wish to avoid are large scale last minute demands for salt in severe weather that could exacerbate already difficult travelling conditions. . The Department would not expect to have to suspend the drivers' hours and working time rules for delivery drivers in these circumstances, because it would be hard to argue that an emergency situation had arisen when it had been foreseen and should have been planned for.

## **Possibility of Power Cuts**

1.The forecast prolonged cold spell may also cause disruption to power distribution. From a roads perspective, loss of power could affect street lighting, traffic signals and other control systems, which are generally fed from local electricity networks. There will be little scope for authorities to assist directly in the restoration of supplies but authorities' nonetheless remain responsible for managing their roads.

2.We recommend that authorities review their contingency plans for catering with these eventualities. Circumstances will vary from place to place but there are likely to be common approaches; for example identifying specific junctions and other locations where prolonged interruption to the supply would cause severe disruption or danger and where some form of intervention would be needed. Authorities will want to include relevant stakeholders in these reviews, in particular the police and other emergency services.

3.Use should also be made of local broadcasting services to give travel information and advice. Staggering journey times in particular can alleviate pressure on the road network

## **Highways Agency**

1. The Highways Agency will endeavour to fulfil its normal objective of keeping motorways and trunk roads clear of ice and snow, and will continue to co-operate with local authorities where necessary and possible. They will also encourage drivers to stay at home or at work when severe weather approaches, to keep roads clear for gritters.

## **Contact Points**

For enquiries on this advice note, please contact Ian Holmes (020 7944 2244) or Edward Bunting (020 7944 2402)

For enquiries on the drivers' hours and working time rules, please contact Andrew Angel (020 7944 2752) or Mark Bosly (020 7944 2757)

For enquiries on traffic signals, communications equipment, or street lighting, please contact David Williams (020 7944 2595)

For enquiries on the Highways Agency, please contact Howard Owen (0117 372 6324)

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**Department for Transport**

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