

# Weight limit rule wins compliance thanks to education

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*Signs posted on every Town of Hull road alerting drivers to the weight limit rule are part of a proactive effort to educate haulers and improve compliance.*

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**TWO YEARS AFTER** enacting a comprehensive ordinance that imposes strict weight limits on all town roads and diverts heavy trucks to alternate routes, the Town of Hull reports that education and a convenient permitting process are behind the success of its ordinance.

Hull's awareness campaign began as a conscious effort to communicate details about the weight limit ordinance before it took effect in October 2007. That campaign evolved into an ongoing effort to promote cooperation and an efficient permitting process. Town Chair John Holdridge and Town Secretary/Deputy Clerk Barbara Brilowski say the majority of truckers and trucking firms doing business in and around the Portage County community have learned to comply.

The town instituted the new rule partly in response to a state interchange project that put more traffic pressure on one town road. The ordinance identifies all town roads as Class B, allowing a maximum total weight without permit of 48,000 lbs, or 12,000 lbs per axle. The ordinance distinguishes between new asphalt roads built to handle limited heavy loads and old roads, sealcoat over gravel, that are at greater risk of damage.

Signs posted on every town road alert road users to the rule.

The ordinance requires that trucks traveling to or from a location in Hull with loads that exceed the limits apply for a permit and work with town officials to determine a suitable route. The law outright prohibits trucks with loads above the limit from using town roads as a shortcut.

## Streamline process

Town officials consider it essential to make getting a permit easy. The goal is to provide reasonable and timely access for trucks delivering goods and services to town residences or businesses.

Brilowski, one of six full-time town employees, manages the process. She describes it as streamlined and straightforward. Operators hauling a load that is over the permitted limit request a permit via phone, fax or email. Brilowski evaluates details about their load and destination to determine the best route. Generally, that means redirecting heavy trucks to Class A state or county roads, especially when they are hauling numerous loads for one job.

Brilowski also specifies an allowable speed limit for the trip if lower than what is posted on the section of Class B road a truck is traveling. In hot weather, the permits require truckers to haul their loads in early morning before pavement surfaces soften from the heat.

The ordinance allows 24-hour turnaround for issuing a permit but in cases where Brilowski is familiar with a company's equipment, their weights and what they haul, the process goes faster. "We turn most permits around quickly so truckers can be on their way," she says.



*Before and after photos of a town road show the damage done by a contractor unloading heavy equipment. Following permit requirements, the company reimbursed Hull for the cost of repairs.*

"But it's important to do this right, to make sure they know what they're signing and abide by that agreement."

The town issued 1,081 permits from January through December 2009 and more than 469 so far in 2010.

Denying a permit can create friction, Holdridge says. But town officials explain in detail why they will not allow a specific request. In one case, the town determined the extreme weight of a proposed load would destroy a culvert under the seal-coated road in question and the hauler would be responsible for replacing it. Once the hauler understood the parameters of the ordinance and their liability, they withdrew the request to use the road.

## Testing the rules

There have been violations that tested the strength of the ordinance. According to Holdridge, it holds up well. Truckers or trucking firms receive a fine for driving on posted town roads without a permit and must pay for any damage they do. The ordinance, based on Wisconsin law, allows Hull to collect triple the costs for repeat violators, something that did occur the first year of enforcement.

The town has recovered more than \$41,000 in damages since 2007 under the ordinance and inspected several locations where a company running heavy trucks did repairs to a road after one of their drivers tore it up moving an overweight load.

Sometimes enforcing the ordinance includes collecting evidence. Logging operations are a prime example. Once the town issues a permit that diverts a logging or similarly heavy truck to Class A roads, a road foreman for the town takes before pictures of the section of Class B road at the delivery or pick-up point. If there is damage, he photographs the road after the hauling operation to record its condition. Holdridge says the pictures are persuasive.

Permit holders generally accept responsibility for repairs.

With enough advance notice, the town meets with companies hauling logs or other heavy loads to discuss their options and find a resolution, like waiting until winter to do the hauling.

The ordinance also gives Hull leverage to warn violators who are unaware of the rule or choose to ignore it. Written warnings to truckers or firms, with the backing of law enforcement, have helped a few local haulers make changes before incurring liability from damaging a road.

### Residents on alert

Local residents know about and support the ordinance. According to Holdridge, many see it as a way to protect the town's investment in road improvements. In an area with subdivisions and cropland where routine commerce includes installing and servicing septic systems, and hauling farm equipment and crops, residents often serve as watchdogs. When someone sees a heavy truck that is out of place or unloading big equipment in the wrong location, they call it in.

Area farmers are exempt from getting permits under the ordinance but must pay for damage that occurs from their use of a town road. Holdridge recalls an instance where the farmer himself reported damage done by an operator he hired to do a job.

### Informed enforcement

Town officials were in touch with local and state law enforcement before enacting the weight limit ordinance since they rely on help from patrol officers to enforce it. Hull contracts with the Portage County Sheriff's Department for additional patrol services from late spring through September. The officers, trained in weight limits, assisted the town in implementing the ordinance. If a trucker is hauling overweight without a permit, the town sends them a warning and information about the local ordinance.

Lieutenant Daniel Kontos, in the department's Operations and Communications Division, commends the advance work Hull did to inform both law enforcement and haulers of the ordinance before its adoption. It gave his office a chance to offer technical advice on enforcement but also to anticipate the impact of the ordinance when introduced. "Our role is to reinforce the legal standing of the ordinance, whether responding to calls or warning an operator about the rule."

Kontos does not recall any major problems with the ordinance since it took effect and adds that as people get to know the rules, the ordinance has become business as usual.

### Safety provisions

Even when damage does not occur, truck drivers traveling on town roads with loads that exceed the limits present a hazard, Holdridge says. Pedestrian and bicycle safety is spelled out in the ordinance, recognition of typical road use in an urban/suburban area. Five roads that head north out of the neighboring City of Stevens Point to become town roads are popular with walkers, joggers, bicyclists and school cross-country teams. The Town of Hull is committed to keeping those roads safe for all users.

Most of the weight limit permits Brilowski issues include underlined reminders about school bus stops and the presence of students and other pedestrians to let truckers know they must share the road safely. Fixing a damaged road is one thing, she says. Someone getting hurt or killed is quite another.

### Proving the solution

Holdridge notes that two-thirds of the town's \$1.7 million annual budget pertains to roads. Protecting the useful life of that resource is a financial necessity for the Town of Hull as for other municipalities in Wisconsin.

Aware that other towns are dealing with more and heavier trucks too, he recommends Hull's



*These photos record culvert damage at the entry and exit point after delivery of a heavy load that received a permit to travel on town roads. Such before-and-after evidence helps with enforcement of Hull's weight limit rules.*



comprehensive approach as the best way to keep good roads in service longer and increase safety. Posting weight restrictions on a single road does not solve the problem of big trucks accelerating pavement wear and tear on the entire network of local roads. They will avoid the posted road but add stress to non-posted town roads.

While the weight limit ordinance is effective, Town of Hull officials are sensitive to the challenge haulers have to move heavy equipment and cargo efficiently. They are promoting addition of a frontage road to create better truck access to Interstate 39 and continuing to refine the process for securing a permit.

"Hull doesn't want to be a thoroughfare for big trucks," concludes Holdridge. "What we do want is to make the town's weight limit rules work for everyone." ■

Learn more about the planning process behind the Town of Hull's weight limit rule in the Fall 2007 issue of *Crossroads*. Download past issues from the newsletter archives at <http://tic.engr.wisc.edu>.

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### Resources

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/modes/trucks.htm>

Wisconsin Department of Transportation link to information on truck routes, weight stations and state patrol enforcement of weight limits.

<http://nxt.legis.state.wi.us>

Legislative link to Wisconsin statutes. Search for Chapter 348 on local limits and Section 349.15 for authority to set limits.

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