

Beloit plans for winter year round

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THE CITY OF BELOIT offers an example of how one local government evaluates and plans winter maintenance operations year round. Beloit Director of Operations, Christine Walsh, tells *Crossroads* how they handle the season. She notes everyone in the department participates in National Incident Management System (NIMS) training. The City manages all snow and ice events as emergencies.

Q *How did you plan for snow and ice events? What's your approach?*

A The operations department follows a 12-month calendar of tasks related to the winter season. Even in July, we do things like ordering our bag salt. To be sure we have enough to get through the winter, we place dual bids for salt 1) the standard guaranteed state bid and 2) a non-guaranteed contract together with Janesville that gives us a backup supply we purchase only if we need it.

Beloit also has a snow-and-ice control policy. Our DPW Code Enforcement group meets with police to review ticketing and moving of parked cars during snow emergencies.

Staff members also need training on how they can do their jobs better. In August, we host a snow

training day that includes classroom learning and hands-on equipment operation, followed by a snow plow rodeo for our staff and neighboring communities. Beloit supervisors meet with surrounding area supervisors to discuss tactics and changes each community may have.

For each snow and ice event (30 events and counting at press time), we prepare by conducting a conference call with all supervisors and our weather forecast service. Next we develop a game plan with employees, review equipment and what products to use and whether we will plow and/or treat depending on the length of the storm. Finally, all staff members, including supervisors, are given shifts and the game is on!

Q *How has this extreme snow year prompted you to change any aspect of your approach?*

A Luckily, we made changes before the season started, not anticipating how bad it would be. We had a staff committee working on a plan for responding to a long-term event. This helped when we had our worst event.

Operations staff made numerous changes this year, including purchase of an Accubrine system for making brine and blending chemicals and a new plow truck with a 1200-gallon tank for anti-icing and de-icing. During one long event, we used the Salvation Army to prepare meals and provided hotel rooms for employees who live outside the city.

We used tracking forms to record mailbox and lawn damage. Clerical staff handled general complaints. Operators now complete a new form for salt and liquid tracking per snow event and an operator truck maintenance form. Supervisors also complete an event tracking form.

Q *How did you handle equipment maintenance, especially with plows in action around-the-clock?*

A Our mechanics are intricately involved with snow and ice operations. They set up our Accubrine system. They also retrofitted a prewet system and our spray unit. We prepped all plow trucks before the season and completed work orders before each event. During most snow events, at least two mechanics were out plowing. This worked well during non-normal working hours. We called the mechanics in from plowing if we needed them.

Q *What did you learn about your operation this recent winter season that you'll use next year?*

A We learned a lot from the pre-developed forms and by debriefing each snow event similar to how police and fire debrief. This allowed any staff that worked an event to talk about what worked and what didn't. Topics included: equipment issues, clerical/dispatch issues, code issues and supervision issues. We plan to continue using all the above strategies. I would like to experiment with some different blends next year. We participate in the APWA North American Snow Conference and send new staff to TIC training on snow and ice to stay on the cutting edge of technology.

Q *What additional observations can you share that would be of interest to other local governments?*

A All communities should take a hard look at liquid application. It actually works in a variety of situations. Staff members like it, we use less salt, it's better for the environment and friendly to municipal budgets. Also, monitor your operators and manage the salt they put out. For some storms, consider spot applications at curves, hills and intersections rather than applying salt along the full length of the road. ■



Snow removal in downtown Beloit, January 2008.