

How does VDOT prepare for winter?

Throughout the year, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) employees across the state prepare for snow and ice by testing equipment, practicing snow routes and stockpiling thousands of tons of salt, sand and chemicals at strategic locations. VDOT also contracts with individuals and companies with heavy equipment, which are placed on standby should they be needed.

How soon will all roads be passable after a winter storm?

Snow-removal crews work around the clock until conditions are safe for travel. At night, hills and trouble spots may be covered with abrasives, such as sand, cinders or fine stone. Beginning around 4 a.m., crews prepare the roads for rush-hour traffic.

What roads are VDOT responsible for clearing?

The department clears all state-maintained roads. Incorporated cities and towns clear their own streets, as do Arlington and Henrico counties.

How does VDOT decide what roads to clear first?

Safety and connectivity are key, so roads carrying the most traffic get top priority. VDOT clears interstates and most primary roads first. Crews also plow major secondary roads with vital emergency and public facilities or those with high traffic volumes.

Other secondary roads and subdivision streets will be treated if multiday storms hit Virginia, but crews will focus their efforts on roads that carry the most traffic.

A statewide network of 97 weather sensors in roadways and bridges allows crews to quickly identify when and where road surfaces might be freezing.

Primary roads are generally numbered 1 through 599. Secondary roads are numbered 600 and up.

Snow emergency routes are key among the top priorities. Localities designate these roads for immediate snow removal so emergency vehicles can use them. Once the snow stops and main roads are clear, residential streets will be sanded or plowed.

What should I do if there's an emergency, and rescue vehicles can't get through on the snowy roads?

Call 911 or local or state police immediately.

If they need help getting to you, they will work with VDOT to get the road cleared.

Why do plows block my driveway with snow when they clear the road?

To make as many roads passable as quickly as possible, there is unfortunately no way to avoid this practice.

VDOT plow operators push snow off the roadway in smooth, continuous passes. It ends up in gutters and on road shoulders, sometimes blocking driveways. To avoid doing extra work, shovel snow from your driveway after a plow has been by.

Shovel it to the right of your driveway as you face the road.

Why do VDOT trucks sometimes drive with their plows up when it is snowing?

There are several reasons these trucks aren't plowing the snow. They may be spreading salt and sand. They may be out of salt or sand and headed back to the maintenance yard for a refill. Or they may be en route to their assigned area. Be assured that when it snows, VDOT crews work around the clock until the roads are passable.

Every year the street next to mine gets plowed, and my street is passed by until much later. Why?

Many subdivisions have more than one snowplow assigned to clear their streets. If the plow you see doesn't get to your street, it means another one has been assigned to your part of the neighborhood and will be along soon.

If snow reaches two inches or more, VDOT activates an online neighborhood tracking map at plows.vdot.virginia.gov. Most VDOT trucks are equipped with automatic vehicle location technology, and many of them can be monitored on the tracker during snow removal operations.

Why doesn't VDOT put salt on the roads before it snows?

Putting salt on roads before it snows wastes time and money, since the salt can blow off the pavement.

Salt is most effective after the snow has accumulated about an inch and the temperature is 27 degrees or higher. Under these conditions, the salt and snow will mix, melting the snow into a slush that can be plowed off the pavement.

This melting occurs within two hours or sooner if traffic is using the roadway. If the temperature is below 27 degrees, salt will not melt the snow and ice. In this case, other methods are used, including abrasives to aid traction and calcium chloride to melt the ice and snow.

How can I find out about road conditions in other parts of Virginia?

Visit 511.vdot.virginia.gov, call 511 or check the 511 Virginia mobile app for up-to-date information on road and traffic conditions.

TTY users can call 711 for the service.

For questions or to report hazardous road conditions, contact VDOT's 24-hour Customer Service Center by visiting my.vdot.virginia.gov or calling 800-FOR-ROAD (367-7623).

How can I get my street on VDOT's list of roads to be plowed?

There is no such list. If the road is state maintained, VDOT is responsible for clearing it.

Is VDOT responsible for clearing sidewalks and trails?

No. VDOT does not remove snow from sidewalks or trails, concentrating instead on making the roads safe.