

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Department of Public Works



Public Roundtable and Hearing on

The District Snow Removal Operations Plan for Winter 2018-2019 and
B22-752, the “Warnings Before Citations Amendment Act of 2018”

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Mary Cheh, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

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Room 500
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Good afternoon, Chairperson Cheh, members, and staff of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment. I am Christopher Shorter, Director of the Department of Public Works (DPW). With me today is DPW's Agency Fiscal Officer, Perry Fitzpatrick. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to testify on behalf of the DC Snow Team regarding the District's 2019 Winter Maintenance Plan. Following my testimony on the snow plan, I will address Bill 22-752, the "Warnings Before Citations Amendment Act of 2018."

I would like to start by expressing my appreciation to the Mayor and the City Administrator for their continued commitment to improving the District's snow and ice removal program.

Mayor Bowser encourages District government agencies to conduct trainings year round so that the city is always prepared. Director Marootian, Acting Director Anderson, and I - along with the staff from the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), Department of General Services (DGS), the Department of Public Works (DPW), and other support agencies - take this directive seriously. We have been planning all year, including a Snow Dry Run that was held on October 26. Throughout this day-long practice exercise, our plow drivers drove their routes, checking for obstacles they might encounter during a snow event. Meanwhile, administrative, supervisory, logistics, and IT employees also simulated their respective functions.

Thanks to this training and preparation, as the DC Snow Team proved on Thursday, the District is ready for winter. Starting at midnight, we deployed 123 plows to spread 1,090 tons of salt throughout the city, ensuring a safe morning commute for our residents. As Mother Nature showed us, winter starts on her timeline, not ours.

2017-2018 Winter Season Recap

The 2017-2018 snow season will be remembered for its duration and volatility, more than its intensity and snow accumulations. In total, the District received 7.8 inches of snow, which is roughly half of the historic average. Nonetheless, there were still 19 deployments, ranging from prowls on the light end, to full plowing on the heavy end. For the second year in a row, March was colder than February. On March 21, we received 4.1 inches of snow, which was more than half of the season's total snow accumulation.

The total cost for last year's snow operation was \$7.6 million. The DC Snow Team used 433,000 gallons of liquid brine and just under 24,000 tons of salt.

As you know, the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists on District roads is our chief concern, but we have also worked hard to balance the environmental concerns of over-salting our roads. We are doing this in three primary ways: increased use of brine; enhanced calibration training of our salt truck drivers and supervisors; and stepped up quality assurance/quality control measures.

Last season, the DC Snow Team ramped up its use of brine as an anti-icing technique. Liquid brine, which is a mixture of water, sodium chloride (salt), and beet juice, helps keep snow and ice from bonding to the pavement, and reduces the amount of time needed to remove snow from streets. Brine has also been shown to decrease the corrosion of infrastructure. In previous years,

we were limited to treating major highways, ramps, bridges, and hilly and problematic streets with our brine and beet juice mixture. But, starting last year and continuing this season, we have expanded our anti-icing operation to include more major thoroughfares, residential, and commercial areas.

Our decision on when and how to use salt in the region varies greatly depending upon a number of factors, including the type of precipitation, road surface temperatures, the time of day the storm is hitting, and the type of traffic expected during the storm. I am pleased to report that our salt usage is trending downward.

2018-2019 Winter Season

Looking ahead to this winter season, the DC Snow Team continues to strengthen our already high-performing operation.

As you know, the District has three basic mobilization plans for snow events that range in severity, from a dusting to a full-blown blizzard:

1. **Full Deployment** for half an inch or more of snow;
2. **Partial Deployment** for a dusting of snow; and
3. **Prowl Deployment** for bridges and overpasses.

The Winter Maintenance Plan divides the District into 14 overall geographical zones, with 71 primary and secondary road routes and 82 residential routes for snow and ice removal.

During a snow event, we deploy six- and 10-wheel dump trucks with plows and salt spreaders along these routes. We call them heavy plows. Our light plows, which are large pickup trucks, are deployed along the 82 residential routes, which are smaller streets. When the Snow Team deploys, residential routes are treated simultaneously with commercial routes. After the heavy plows finish their routes, we re-deploy them to support the light plows working on the residential routes.

This year's snow and ice removal program includes:

- 834 DC Snow Team personnel;
- 210 heavy plows;
- 181 light plow pick-ups;
- 25 front-end loaders;
- 12 skid steers;
- 28 liquid dispensing trucks;
- 25,912 tons of salt on hand with an additional 15,000 tons available immediately through purchase order; and
- 12,500 gallons of beet juice and 86,100 gallons of brine hot mix.

We use the Road Weather Information System (RWIS) for air and pavement temperatures, as well as other weather data. Through the Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS), we have access to regional traffic monitoring, construction, and real-time incident reporting that affects traffic.

While public safety is always our top priority, we must also consider the impact snow removal has on the environment.

Environmental Considerations

When large amounts of snow fall on the District, we must transition from a snow plowing operation to a snow hauling operation and haul snow from streets and sidewalks to restore safe travel citywide. In partnership with the office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development's (DMPED) and the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE), we have identified potential snow storage sites in each quadrant of the District and will work quickly to determine the efficacy of each of those locations. The selected sites will be evaluated by DOEE, DPW, and DDOT to ensure each site has the capacity for storm water control measures, presents limited traffic and safety concerns, and lies within the combined sewer system.

Training and Technology

Another critical component of our season readiness includes ensuring that our staff is fully trained and connected. In addition to the Snow Dry Run, tomorrow the full 834-member DC Snow Team will participate in the DC Snow Summit. Along with our partners at DDOT, DGS, and the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA), we will review and discuss District-specific challenges and solutions to severe winter weather, road treatment, and snow removal operations.

Along with the Snow Dry Run and Snow Summit, 503 employees have attended classroom snow training, and 240 employees have participated in hands-on, heavy and light plow training. Specialized, job-specific training sessions have also been provided on everything from safety to how to effectively clear bridges.

The snow program continues to build upon its use of technology to streamline operations and improve efficiency. This includes our enhanced notification system that contacts every member of the Snow Team via email, text, and a personalized phone call to ensure that they know where and when to report for duty. It also includes our enhanced Automated Vehicle Locator (AVL) system, which allows us to track our plows in real time, ensuring that routes are being completed and issues can be spotted and addressed quicker than ever.

Quality Controls and Operation Updates

Clearing our city's streets and public facilities of snow and ice is essential to the District's ability to conduct commerce. Even more importantly, our work is critical to public safety, ensuring that ambulances, fire trucks, and police vehicles can get where they need to be. We know District residents are relying on us, and we take our duty seriously. With this in mind, we have continued to enhance our Quality Assurance and Quality Control (QA/QC) measures. When our plows are deployed, so are our QA/QC teams, who fan out across the city, monitoring road conditions and verifying our plows' progress.

We are also aware that more and more District residents use bicycles as their preferred means of transportation. Last season, we established a new Non-Motorized Trails Section dedicated to clearing bike paths, bridge deck sidewalks, ADA ramps at intersections, and bus shelters. We

piloted specially outfitted Club Cars for this operation, but, unfortunately, found the equipment to be less than ideal. To correct this problem, we secured new Ventrac snow blowers for this season that will enable us to more effectively clear bike lanes and other non-motorized trails. For the general public's understanding, I should note that bike lanes are generally cleared after roads so that our plows don't push snow from the road into a freshly cleared bike lane.

What We Need Residents and Businesses to Do

Within the District, residents and business owners play a crucial role in our response to a snow event.

In accordance with DC law, we ask property owners—residential and commercial—to clear their sidewalks within 24 hours after a storm ends. Walking is the primary means of transportation for our children making their way to school and for many adults making their way to work. For seniors and people with disabilities, an exemption is available. I would also encourage residents to join ServeDC's Volunteer Snow Team, which helps clear sidewalks for our seniors and residents with disabilities, at servedc.gov.

When a snow storm is underway, we encourage residents to visit snow.dc.gov to see where the plows are working. There, residents will also find safety tips for pedestrians, motorists, and cyclists. The site also explains what happens when a snow emergency is declared, and lists the snow emergency routes where parking is prohibited

Leaf Collections

Finally, with DPW's leaf collection operation now well underway, I would like to take a moment to remind residents that inclement weather can cause delays to this service. When the DC Snow Team deploys, our leaf collection trucks must stop collecting leaves to be outfitted with snow plows and salt spreaders. Once the weather improves, the trucks are cleaned and outfitted to resume leaf operations. This process can take several days. Further delays can also be expected when leaves are wet or frozen, as such conditions hamper our equipment's ability to function properly.

With that said, as I shared with this committee earlier in the year, we have made several improvements to our leaf operations that I believe have set us up for a successful leaf collection season.

Bill 22-752, the *Warnings Before Citations Amendment Act of 2018*

Switching gears, I would now like to address Councilmember Todd's legislation to amend the *Litter Control Administrative Act of 1985* to require a warning be issued in any instance related to residential collection of solid waste prior to issuing a citation.

As you know, the District has regulations that govern when trash and recycling bins may be brought out onto public space. The regulations stipulate that bins may not be brought out onto public space before 6:30 p.m. on the day prior to collection and must be removed from public space by 8:00 p.m. on the scheduled collection day. This regulation stems from the *Litter Control Administration Act of 1985* and helps keep our city clean by ensuring residents and business

owners do their part to maintain the space in and around their property. The regulation also keeps sidewalks, roads, and alleyways passable and safe.

While these regulations have been in effect for years, after corresponding with a number of residents earlier this year, it became clear that many were unaware of the regulation and were caught off guard when they were issued citations by DPW's Solid Waste Education and Enforcement Program (SWEEP) inspectors. In particular, residents were confused in February during the week of the Presidents Day holiday when trash and recycling collections "slid" throughout the week to accommodate the holiday.

With this in mind, we made the decision to dismiss all Notice of Violations (NOV) issued for this violation for those residents who had not previously received a warning. The dismissals applied to 377 citations given between February 19, 2018 (Presidents' Day) and May 15, 2018. We also made the decision to change our internal policy so that, going forward, no resident would receive a citation—which carries a \$75 fine—unless they had previously received a warning. In other words, this legislation would simply codify a change that we have already made.

I would also like to note that DPW has stepped up its public education efforts on this and other requirements related to how residents should properly prepare their trash and recyclables for collection. As an example of our outreach efforts, this past spring we sent a mailer to all the households DPW services with information about sanitation regulations that apply to residents. We also created and have begun distributing "oops" tags that our crews leave behind to let residents know when they have done something improper, such as leaving their cans out in public space outside of the allotted collection time period.

Conclusion

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to provide the Committee with testimony on behalf of the DC Snow Team. I want to thank the DPW team as well as our partners in other District agencies for the work completed during the off-season to prepare for this year's winter season.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to respond to questions.