

Questions Feb 5 2014

Q. It is amazing with all the negative press Atlanta received from their snow storm, how we fared so much better up here. Why was that?

A. The obvious reason is that we did not have a million people leaving work and school at the same time and our salt trucks could get out on the highway immediately. Our school let out at 10:30 and by 12:30 everyone was home. They did have one bus slide in a ditch but the bus was empty and did not even require a wrecker and suffered no damage. We closed the courthouse at noon and most other business sent their employees home. We had one wreck and other than minor damage, have suffered no real problems because most people stayed off the roads and were able to get home, while in Atlanta, the roads, with all the traffic, turned to ice almost immediately and you saw the results on TV.

Q. Are all snow storms basically alike in how the county reacts to them?

A. No, actually each snow storm is different based on the time of day it hits, the type snow that is falling and the temperature at the time it is snowing, the highway temperature and wind conditions.

Q. What do you mean when you refer to the "type of snow" in a storm?

A. There are basically two types of snow in North Georgia. "Wet" snow and "dry" snow. 90% of the snow we have always had through the years has been wet snow. That means it usually falls in the temperature range of 34 degrees down to 28 or 30 degrees. Wet snow is sticky and will easily make snow balls and snow men. It is much harder to ski on because the edge of your ski will catch it and cause you to fall. On roads it compacts very quickly and is prone to turning to ice with light traffic. About 10" of snow is equivalent to 1" of rain.

"Dry" snow usually falls with temperatures below 28 degrees and the ground already below freezing. This snow is more of a powder consistency, light and fluffy, and hard to make snow balls with as it will usually not make a snow ball, and is very difficult to make a snow man out of. Dry snow is excellent for skiing. Most snow in the West is dry snow and most snow in the east is wet. It takes 20" to 30" of dry snow to equal 1" of rainfall. Dry snow does not melt as easily and we have certainly seen the results of that.

Q. With this last snow storm, was our snow "dry" or "wet"?

A. This may sound like a politician, but it was part of each. If you tried to make a snowball out of it, you could, but it required much more pressure and squeezing. It would be very difficult to make a snow man, but could be done. However, on the roads, unless packed by a lot of traffic, the snow remained with the characteristics of dry snow and provided reasonable traction for driving as long as it was not a steep slope.

If this had been wet snow, it would be frozen by now and just about like solid ice. It would also probably be melted much sooner. However, even today, Thursday night after the snow began on Tuesday morning, this snow is still soft and pliable with just a slight crust on it. So as bad as this winter storm has been, it could have been much worse. I

suspect the snow in Atlanta was similar but with a little more moisture which allowed it to freeze and basically turn to ice on the roadways almost instantly.

Q. When will our roads be back to normal as I am getting cabin fever?

A. I want to thank so many people that have realized what a great road crew we have. We have seven salt trucks all with blades, plus we also spread gravel with an additional truck. But this snow will NOT go away. Even today, there are still many icy spots and most are either in shady areas or on the north slope where they do not receive much sunshine. Friday evening should just about wrap up the worst road problems, but there will still be plenty of snow remaining on some roads and driveways Saturday and the rain coming Sunday should clean everything else up. I have never seen this small amount of snow have such a huge impact on our road system.

Q. If the Road Dept. has had seven trucks running around the clock since Tuesday, why aren't all the roads clear by now?

A. We have been over many of the roads several times and by Friday evening will have been over almost all county roads once. The near zero freezing that started the day of the snow seems to have some magic to it and the packed road surface is solid ice and it just does not seem to melt in some places even with three layers of salt and gravel. In higher elevations, the ground was colder sooner and the snow just refuses to melt even with salt. Scrape blades will not go through the ice and we simply have to wait on it to melt or have the salt activated by sun light and warmer temperatures.

***Following this snow storm, we will have a joint meeting with all the area agencies involved to discuss what was done and what can be done in the future to improve our performance. I want to compliment GDOT for the excellent job they did on the state highways and how that made our job easier. However, we can always learn from an event and try to improve. A special thanks to all public safety personnel in the county for an outstanding job in the worst of conditions and especially our own Road Dept.