

Questions February 19, 2014

Q. Please tell the Road Dept how much we appreciate the excellent job they did on our roads during this storm. We truly feel blessed to have such dedicated employees.

A. While this is not a question, it is something I heard over and over this past week during the storm. Either in person or on face book, literally hundreds of people asked me to let the Road Dept. crews know what a great job they did and how they appreciated their dedication to their job. Also included were the other public safety employees.

Q. How many hours did the Road Dept. work during the storm?

A. Since we had ample warning of the storm, our guys were sitting ready to go when the storm first hit about 3:00 am Tuesday morning. From that point on, they never stopped scraping roads and spreading salt. Then on Wednesday morning we brought in our private contractors with motor graders who worked most of the day and into the night. They were a great help to our regular crews. As I am writing this, we are still scraping roads at 6:00 Thursday night.

Q. Did it snow as much as the weather service estimated?

A. No, it did not. The first night they estimated 2" to 4", the second night they estimated 6" to 8" and the third night they estimated 6" to 9". The news kept reporting we were having some of the biggest snow amounts in the state, yet we only ended up with 2" to 4" in most places. It probably snowed more but so much of it melted. Atlanta had more snow than we did.

Q. Did you anticipate the break in time between the two storms?

A. They estimated maybe a couple hours break, but we had several hours which allowed our Road Dept. to catch up with road plowing. We were then very surprised on Wed. night when it rained for such a long time. That also helped us to keep up with the snow plowing, as it helped turn most of the road cover into slush.

Q. We kept seeing the temperatures reported on TV to be lower than they actually were. Do you know why?

A. That was a puzzle to me as well. All the models gave Union County as being one of the coldest areas of the state. We think it might have been because the mountain range kept the colder temps from coming in from the NE through SC. What ever the reason we are really thankful as we stayed at or above freezing most of the storm event, which made a huge difference in our total impact.

Q. Were you pleased with the county's response to the storm?

A. I sure was. The employees all worked extremely hard as they do in every storm. Prior to the storm, I called an agency meeting at the Fire Department Operations Center to discuss the last storm and the upcoming one. We had representatives of Notla and Coosa Water Authorities, Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, Heritage and Proflame Propane, City of Blairsville, Police and Sheriff, Fire Dept. and Union General Ambulance Service, Vogel, Dept. of Natural Resources, GDOT, UC Road Dept, Health Dept., Senior Citizens

Center, U.C. Schools, and Windstream, for a total of 36 people. We discussed strategy and how we could improve our service. We continue to have a great sense of cooperation among all agencies which helps continue to make this one of the best places to live in the world.

Q. How much was the cost of this storm compared to the last storm two weeks ago?

A. We do not have all the numbers yet, but it will be more as this event was really three storms in one. After the rain period when we had many of the roads cleared, we got the all night snow Wednesday night and almost had to start all over. Even today, Thursday, we have had crews scraping the snow off roads all day and there will still be some that will probably not be completely cleared until the sunshine tomorrow.

Q. We heard on TV that many counties ran low or out of salt. How much does the county have remaining?

A. Our Road Dept. purchased the maximum they could buy early in the season. Because we built three huge concrete storage bins for salt, we can store more tonnage than most and can store about 1 million lbs (500 tons) of salt. We used 300 tons during this storm and have 200 tons of salt remaining. We hope we have found a source and will try to purchase at least 200 additional tons.

Q. How much does salt cost?

A. Usually, the cost with delivery is in the \$80 to \$100/ ton range, but this year if you can find it, we have heard of prices over \$ 300 a ton. We were able to purchase 100 tons for \$90/ton after the last storm. So the use of 300 tons at \$ 100/ton means we paid \$ 30,000 just for the salt, plus labor, equipment, private contractors and gravel to mix with the salt at almost 200 tons (\$ \$3,000 to \$ 5,000) Our total cost of the last storm Leon was about \$30,000 and this storm will probably be in the \$50,000 range. Does this impact our budget - you bet it does.

We once again want to thank our other departments who did an outstanding job including all those on the list at the meeting listed in one of the questions above. I am proud to be associated with so many hard working individuals as our Public Safety members and all support staff that makes this work so smoothly. A special thanks to the public who stayed at home while we all worked on the roads and attended to all emergencies in the county including one home destroyed by fire.

Lamar Paris
Union County Commissioner