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Governor

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Press Release

How the New Mexico Department of Transportation Keeps Roads Safe in Wintry Weather

Santa Fe - The New Mexico Department of Transportation is in charge of maintaining many of the roads across the state. They are listed below and numbered according to their priority for being plowed and cleared.

1. Interstates
2. U.S. Highways
3. School Bus Routes on state-maintained roads
4. State Highways

Road clearing process:

A couple of hours before the storm is set to hit, road maintainer crews are called in as a preventative measure to ensure the equipment is ready and the trucks are loaded with materials (salt and cinder. The cinder is actually red pumice stone that's mined west of Santa Fe). At the first sight of the wintry weather they begin putting down salt on the roads to keep them from freezing. A layer of cinder follows to provide traction. They repeat this process over and over again as needed throughout the storm and as long as it's needed afterwards.

Statewide the NMDOT has approximately 300 road maintainers and 150 snow plows (that does not include the trucks that spread salt and cinder) who work to clear the roads of ice and snow. During winter weather events they work 12 hour shifts. The crews are fully staffed, even during holidays. Last year the NMDOT conducted 860,000 miles of snow and ice removal statewide. That is equivalent to 34 and a half trips around the world.

The department's road condition website is www.nmroads.com and is linked to our 511 road condition hotline. During storm events, the site is updated 24 hours. NMDOT workers in the field call in to report the conditions where they are working to our staff that updates the website.

The NMDOT works closely with the New Mexico State Police in making safety decisions including road closures during extreme weather events. Although a road may be closed, the NMDOT continues to work on clearing it to have it reopened as soon as it is safely possible. Bypassing barricades puts motorists at a severe risk. Not only are they driving in severe road conditions but they could be stranded in an isolated area.

Driver safety during wintry conditions:

- Wear your seatbelt
- Slow down and leave extra space between your vehicle and the one in front of you.
- Use brakes carefully. It takes more time and distance to stop in adverse conditions.

- Use extra caution on bridges, ramps, overpasses and shaded areas since they are likely to freeze first and stay frozen the longest.
- If you find yourself behind a snowplow please be patient and give the driver plenty of room to do his job.

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