

State's transportation crews gear up for winter

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It's the time of year when we're gearing up for winter, including the crews with the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

The following is a conversation with ODOT's public relations spokesman, Gary Leaming, about the agency's winter preparations and how crews will work to keep roads open and safe.

The Pilot: What has ODOT been doing over the past few weeks to prepare for the upcoming winter weather?

Gary Leaming: We typically have our stockpile of cinder, de-icer ... and on the I-5 corridor, salt ... ready to go. Plows are mounted and ready to roll. We're all getting ready for the storm. Drivers have to do their part, too. That means getting your vehicle ready, carrying chains and knowing how to put them on, checking your tires and packing an emergency kit.

The Pilot: In Curry County, which areas will ODOT address first?

Leaming: For Curry County, the big concern is wind and trees/power lines down. When snow or freezing weather occurs, our priorities are the state's highways, de-icing bridges and the steep grades on U.S. Highway 101.

The Pilot: For snow and ice conditions, will ODOT be using salt, sand, de-icer or a combination to help folks get from one point to the other?

Leaming: On the coast and inland highways, we DON'T use salt. But we use a combination of plow, de-icer and sand (cinder or one-quarter-minus gravel) for traction.

The Pilot: What is the annual ODOT winter weather budget and what does that fund?

Leaming: We budget around \$8 million a year in southwest Oregon/Region 3 for winter maintenance. This covers all snow- and ice-related activities; and slides, sinks and rockfall-related activities. This is within our overall budget, so on big years, we have to cover overages from routine maintenance and we get less pavement repair, brushing, striping, etc., completed.

The Pilot: What are the recommendations for travelers in this area during any adverse winter weather?

Leaming: Be prepared for winter weather and delays. We can't do our job if you don't do yours. Monitor the weather forecast. Add more time to get to your destination. Have your vehicle fueled and ready.

ODOT provides road and weather information online at TripCheck.com, and on the phone at 511.

Select updated reports about driving conditions by highway, mountain pass or major city from easy-to-use menus. The 511 system responds to both voice and touch-tone commands.

Calls to 511 are local when dialed from a pay phone or wire line phone. Mobile phone users are responsible for airtime and roaming charges according to their wireless service contracts, but ODOT does not impose any additional charges.

Most wireless companies in Oregon provide 511 service. If you cannot use 511, call toll-free 800-977-ODOT for road and weather information.

For more information, visit <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/pages/winter-driving>.