

Works dept. works hard to cope with Bancroft weather



Bancroft road workers Darren Naulls, Dean Card, and Tom Rollins start to put chains on one of the plows. Works manager Perry Kelly notes that each of these drivers has a back-up driver, so the plows are available 24/7. TONY PEARSON Special to This Week

By Tony Pearson

It has been said that we often take for granted the very things that most deserve our thanks. Sometimes that applies to our public services as well.

Take Bancroft's public works department. Last week, they had to deal first with an ice storm, then with a huge dump of snow. The statistics can give a dimension to the work involved: on Wednesday and Thursday, they removed more than 250 tandem truckloads of snow just from Connecting Link roads.

To govern its actions, the department works to certain standards. For example, crews have to have all the township's roads sanded within a maximum of 16 hours after the brunt of the storm has passed ? less for the more travelled roads. Perry Kelly, Bancroft's public works manager, states that in almost all cases, the crews do way better than the standard.

Freezing rain presents even more of a problem. For one thing, you can't lay down sand until the rain stops, or the ice will just cover the sand and the rain will wash it away, meaning that all your efforts have been wasted. And that's a lot of material, since a snowstorm will require about four truckloads of sand, while freezing rain can easily take double that amount.

Clearing icy roads in a timely fashion has additional problems. The trucks must be fitted with chains, a process that takes between 45 minutes and an hour. On top of that, the chains slow their top speed down to 25 kilometres an hour. Then the drivers have to deal with obstacles such as stuck cars blocking parts of the road. They have to drive heavily loaded trucks down steep hills covered with ice. And they have to get the work done by the time specified.

Kelly is always quick to praise the work of all township crews. He notes that they have to work at night, with limited visibility (especially during a snowstorm), and frequently for days at a time as one storm follows another. ?I can't say enough,? says Kelly, ?about the quality and dedication of our crews to keep our roads safe.? He observes that after the early morning freezing rain on Monday, all town roads had been double-sanded by mid-afternoon.

The equipment operators note that they have to make sure that they keep their rigs rolling. ?If you're driving a plow truck worth \$200,000,? says Tom Rollins, ?you have to keep it working.?

?You're of no use if you're stuck in a ditch,? adds Darren Naulls.

In-town operator Dean Card puts it vividly: ?Imagine yourself trying to get a full load of sand up or down Cleek or John Street; believe me, it's nerve wracking.? As Kelly notes, ?You're constantly making split-second decisions throughout your shift.?

Of course, if you have to drive, the sanding may not come fast enough. One local resident I spoke to had to get some prescriptions for his wife on Monday morning.

Unfortunately, he slid going up a hill and ended up in a snowbank, with part of the car across the road. Later, when he made it back, he found that his car had been struck by a hit-and-run driver, causing thousands of dollars of damage.

Perry notes that during adverse weather, you should wait until you know the situation has improved. If you have to go out, the Highway Traffic Act states that you have to ?drive to the conditions of the road.?

Bancroft Councillor Bill Kilpatrick also spun out trying to get to work Monday morning. He says he understands why road clearance can take longer than expected. However, he feels when this is the case ? when road operations will take longer than usual ? the town should make a public announcement to this effect, using radio and social media. If the public is informed of the difficulties, he feels, they will appreciate the services delivered all the more.