

Snow woes abound around Nova Scotia, with more white stuff on its way

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A pedestrian walks along Spring Garden Road in

Halifax on Tuesday. (INGRID BULMER / Staff

Back-to-back snowstorms have left winter-weary

Halifax residents battling slippery, snowy and ice-packed roads and sidewalks.

With another big wallop on its way, Darrin Natolino, superintendent of winter operations, said crews are working round the clock.

“It’s all hands on deck,” Natolino said Tuesday. “We don’t stop at any point, other than to hand the next guys the set of keys.”

Winter crews are focused on hauling away snow from cul-de-sacs, clearing bus stops, pushing back and removing snowbanks and widening intersections and turning lanes.

“It’s a battle of inches,” Natolino said. “We’re not going to stand down.”

But clearing compacted snow and ice has left the city’s winter equipment worse for wear.

“We had three blowers on the go last night, and all three of them broke down,” he said. “The type of material we’re running through is difficult on the gear.

“We have mechanics working day and night ... but we ended up having to use the good old-fashioned scoop method with backhoes. It works, but it’s slow going.”

Slow progress and messy streets and sidewalks have left many residents struggling to get around or stuck in their homes.

Some critics have expressed frustration that the municipality’s \$20-million snow budget doesn’t yield better results and questioned the city’s efforts to clear snow and ice.

Coun. Wayne Mason (Halifax South Downtown) said he has heard a range of concerns from residents.

“Some people want snow to magically disappear three hours after a snowfall, but others have legitimate mobility concerns that we need to address.”

Although city crews are doing their best to clear away snow and ice from streets and sidewalks, he said they “just keep getting knocked back.”

Mason said it’s important for residents to report dangerously narrow streets, slippery hills and intersections, and missed roads and sidewalks so that crews can add them to their priority list.

But he said the last few weeks of nasty winter weather has made one thing clear: small skid-steer loaders, often called by the brand name Bobcat, don't work on peninsula sidewalks.

Mason said the sidewalks were in a much better condition when they were cleared by hand.

“What I would say to people this weekend is I know you're paying taxes for it and I know you're unhappy with the service, but we are in a bit of an emergency. Please get out there and keep those sidewalks clear for your neighbours, for the seniors, for the kids walking to school.”

Another 15 to 20 centimetres is expected Friday.

Winter crews and contractors have to clear 3,800 lane kilometres of roads, 1,000 kilometres of sidewalks and 3,600 bus stops.

Natolino said the costs of clearing these roads and sidewalks across the municipality are fixed, such as public works wages or seasonal contracts.

Although there are some variable costs, such as overtime, extra salt, fuel and replacing broken equipment, he said it is too soon to know whether the snow budget will come in on budget.

But Natolino dispelled a rumour that the city has already run out of salt.

He said Halifax orders about 20,000 tonnes of salt at the start of the winter season, which it stores in three domes across the municipality.

While supplies are now down to about one-third, or roughly 7,000 tonnes of salt, he said there are trucks arriving every day from a salt mine in Pugwash.

Meanwhile, Natolino said in addition to clearing any new snow and salting roads, every day his department is coming up with a game plan to remove snow buildup around the city.

On Monday night, crews removed roughly 350 dump truckloads of snow from clogged streets in downtown Halifax and Dartmouth, as well as on Sackville Drive.

The overnight snow clearing work Tuesday focused on pushing back and removing snow banks, clearing snow from cul-de-sacs and widening intersections and turning lanes. Snow was also hauled away from blocked bus stops.

Crews worked from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. focusing on Brenton Street, Dresden Row, Birmingham Street, Sackville Street, Grafton Street, Market Street as well as a number of other main thoroughfares on the peninsula.

In Dartmouth, work crews removed snow from Alderney Drive, Victoria Road and several other main roads and intersections.

About 60 centimeters of snow and freezing rain has hit the municipality over the last week. Halifax normally gets around 40 centimeters in the entire month of February.

Crews are trying to remove snow before another significant snowfall of about 20 centimeters arrives Friday.

A low pressure system is forecast to develop off the east coast of the United States on Thursday and then track towards the Maritimes Thursday night and Friday, according to Environment Canada.

There a potential for significant snowfall and possible winter storm conditions for Nova Scotia on Friday, the federal forecasting agency said in a special weather statement.