NOTICE OF PROPOSED GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Connector December 2018 newsletter article

Pursuant to Wis. Stat. s. 227.112, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation is hereby seeking comment on Connector December 2018 newsletter article [Wis. Stat. ch. 346], a proposed guidance document.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION

Comments may be submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation for 21 days by:

1. Department's website: https://appengine.egov.com/apps/wi/dot/guidance-docs?guidDocId=OPA168

2. Mailing written comments to:

Office of Public Affairs
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
4822 Madison Yards Way
PO Box 7910
Madison, WI 53707-7910

WEBSITE LOCATION OF FINAL GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

The final version of this guidance document will be posted at wisconsindot.gov to allow for ongoing comment.

AGENCY CONTACT

DOTOPAGuidanceDocs@DOT.WI.GOV

Connector newsletter - December 2018

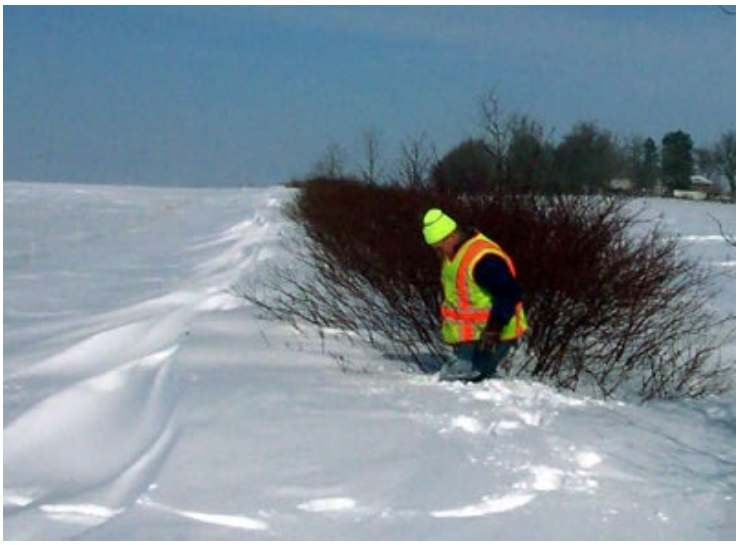
The Connector

Living snow fence plants seeds of safe travel along Wisconsin highways
Give winter maintenance crews time, space to work

Living snow fence planting seeds of safe travel along Wisconsin roads

Joe Starr - December 1

Blowing and drifting snow can be a beautiful sight during wintertime travels through Wisconsin, but that beauty can spell danger for motorists.



Wind loses speed as it is forced to go around and through the living snow fence, stopping much of blowing snow short of the roadway as it loses the wind's momentum, drops and collects in and around the shrub barrier.

This is why WisDOT is working to keep the winter wonder at a distance by trapping snow well off the roadside through a practice called living snow fence. This is a road safety strategy Wisconsin adopted in the early 1930s where trees, shrubs and native grasses are planted along roadsides to capture blowing snow before it reaches the road where it can create whiteout conditions, drifts and other hazards.

"Snow fences help maintain clear roads by capturing blowing snow upwind of a problem and storing that snow over the winter season," said WisDOT Snow Fence Program Coordinator Peter Wisniewski.

Living snow fence use expanded rapidly through the 1930s throughout Wisconsin and became the primary line of defense for roadways against blowing and drifting snow – common contributors to traffic crashes. In the 1950s when snow removal equipment became more widely used, living snow fence plantings tapered off. It wasn't until recent years that a resurgence in living snow fence planting was realized as WisDOT searched for new and cost-effective road maintenance tools.

According to the Strategic Highway Research Program, "it costs 100 times more to plow snow than to trap it with a snow fence." And once a living snow fence is established there is little maintenance. In 2018, WisDOT planted 48,205 linear feet of living snow fence using 28,830 shrubs. Funding for the program comes from outdoor advertising and utilities that pay WisDOT to remove trees for their purposes along road rights of way. Program costs are further offset through a partnership WisDOT has with Wisconsin DNR where it purchases bulk plant stock at reduced prices from DNR nurseries.

Most Wisconsin living snow fences consist of shrubs planted from seedlings. These fences take up to five years of growth before providing effective protection, yet benefits are often seen in as few as two years. There are instances where vegetation dies and replanting is needed but overall a living snow fence lives 75 years or longer, requiring little maintenance over the lifecycle. Quite a difference from wood lathe and orange fencing alternatives that require significantly more maintenance and have a life expectancy of six years at best.

The return on investment from a single living snow fence can be substantial, says Wisniewski. One example he pointed to is a line of fence installed along a 1.5 mile stretch of I-39 that cost roughly $240,000. After the fence was established, there was a 69 percent decrease in the number of crashes along this stretch and an estimated $1.9 million in savings to the state in crash costs. This doesn't include money saved from reduced need for snow plow and other maintenance.

These fences also act as habitat giving shelter to pollinating insects, birds and other wildlife that otherwise might not have such a haven in the area. Erosion is mitigated as plant roots help to keep soil in place. In cases where the fence lies alongside farmland it can act as shelter for livestock while snow drifts eventually turn to spring snow melt, a welcome guest during the planting season.

Living snow fences built in the early years of the program were made primarily of evergreen trees. This worked well as long as the trees were smaller and branches low to the ground. But as the trees grew those lower branches grew up with the trees leaving gaps below where snow could then blow through. To fix this issue, Wisniewski says they locate the trouble spots and plant bushes in front of the tree lines to capture that low blowing snow. Most living snow fences planted today are made of shrubs, with evergreen trees used on occasion where the design warrants. Spacing between shrubs, height, and the fences angle and setback from the road are all carefully considered when installing a living snow fence.

While there are nearly 100 miles of living snow fence along Wisconsin's interstate system, Wisniewski says that isn't much when you think of how many miles there are in the entire state network. The need is especially challenging along two-lane highways where narrow rights of way don't allow the necessary setback required for a living snow fence. Some of these gaps are being filled by a sister program to living snow fence called standing corn row snow fence, which uses corn rows running parallel to the road to slow winds and capture snow.

Overall, Wisniewski says a living snow fence can be a win-win for landowner and taxpayers by increasing the number of planted trees to improve soil stability, aesthetics, wildlife habitat, and protecting livestock and crops all while saving highway maintenance costs and improving safety for motorists.

Numerous economic benefits have and will continue to come from the living snow fence program, but for Wisniewski it's primarily about safety.

"To know that more motorists along any given stretch of highway will make it home safely because of something you put together is a whole different level of gratification."

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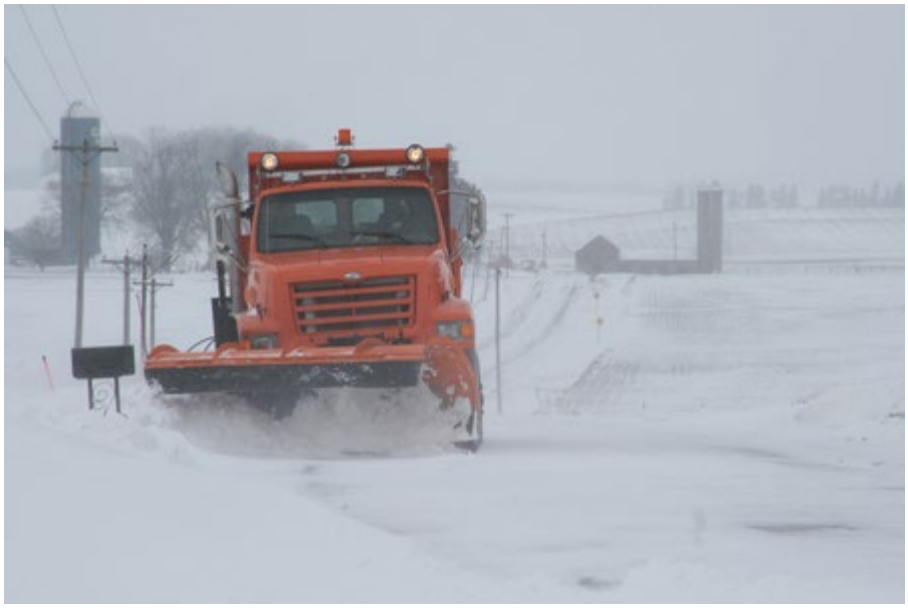
Give winter maintenance crews time, space to work

Wisconsin DOT - December 1



Wisconsin is a winter wonderland. Whether it is a December trip to Lambeau Field for an ice bowl experience, an Apostle Islands Ice Cave adventure or chilling at a ski chalet watching the slope action on Granite Peak, every road in each one of the Badger State's 72 counties is a passage to wintertime fun.

Keeping those passages clear and safe for drivers is the job of county highway and local road maintenance crews, which are out salting, deicing and plowing roads before, during and after winter weather events. The job is complex. Drivers must manage the vehicle's many operating parts while communicating with their base and other operators, and keeping an eye out for motorists on the road. And doing it all during what are often inclement weather conditions. In 2018 to date, there have been 275 traffic crashes in Wisconsin involving snow plows, resulting in 44 injuries and zero fatalities. Each maintenance vehicle operator goes through safety training, but maintaining safe travel along Wisconsin roads requires all drivers to work together to keep roads safe. Here are

some safety tips to remember:

Know before you go

Before every trip, check the weather forecast and know what road conditions are coming. 511 Wisconsin has current weather and road condition information to help with travel planning. During stormy weather, consider postponing travel until conditions improve and maintenance vehicles have had time to treat and clear roads. Reschedule nonessential appointments and, if possible, work from home. Avoiding travel when road conditions are poor decreases traffic distractions for maintenance vehicle operators.

Give extra space

If you need to be on the road during a storm, be aware that maintenance vehicles will be out and give them extra room to work. State law requires motorists traveling on a highway with a posted speed limit higher than 35 mph to maintain at least 200 feet of space between their vehicle and a working maintenance vehicle operator. Because of their size, weight and the equipment they carry, a maintenance vehicle's maneuverability is more restrictive and stopping distance farther than smaller and lighter passenger cars. Maintenance vehicles also take unusual travel patterns, making sudden turns, stops and moving in reverse as they work to clear roads, ramps, shoulders and other roadway sections. For all of these reasons, giving these working trucks a wide berth is the right decision.

Be patient

Working plow trucks travel at about 35 mph so be patient when following and think before passing. The freshly plowed road behind a plow truck is likely safer than the unplowed road that lies ahead of the plow. Before deciding to pass, consider whether it is necessary. If the plow truck is traveling at 35 mph, the speed for that highway is 45 mph and your destination is less than 10 miles away, is the time saved worth it?

Passing a snow plow

It is legal in Wisconsin to pass a snow plow, but take care in doing so. If you do decide to pass, be sure you're in a legal passing zone before checking that it is safe to pass, and always pass on the left. Law enforcement advises motorists to always pass on the left, but this becomes especially important when passing a working snow plow as their wing blades push snow to the right, making passing on its right side dangerous. Even when passing on the left, be aware that the truck may still throw ice and blowing snow in your direction, creating whiteout conditions and other hazards as you pass. And remember that the snow plow's wing blade can extend up to 10 feet beyond the width of the truck, so ensure there is enough room to pass before committing. Many snow plow wing blades are hit each season by vehicles attempting to pass the snowplow.

When approaching an oncoming plow truck, move away from the centerline as far as safely possible. Blowing snow coming from the truck can obscure vision of the wing blade, traffic and other hazards.

Headlights on

Turn on headlights so plow drivers can see you coming. There is plenty going on with the plow operations and even the best trained plow driver can have a rough time seeing a passenger vehicle when visibility is low. Do plow drivers a favor—turn on headlights and help to keep everyone safe.

More safe driving tips

Plan – Know your destination and how to get there before you begin your trip or have a passenger navigate. Never attempt to be the driver and the map reader.

Drop distractions – Turn off and stow phones; shave, do makeup and eat before leaving the

house; and give the road your full attention while driving.

Drive sober – Driving impaired is illegal, dangerous and selfish. Don't do it.

Stay awake - Be well rested before you get behind the wheel. If you feel sleepy, pull over at a rest area, wayside or find another safe location to stop and rest.

Buckle up - In Wisconsin, all drivers of motor vehicles and all passengers older than 4 years must wear safety belts. Consistent safety belt use is the most effective way to protect against being ejected from a vehicle or thrown around violently inside it during a crash.

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