

**Date:** January 23, 2014

**From:** Doug Davis, Muskingum County Engineer

**Comments:**

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**For Press Release:**

*Salt supply shortage for County Engineer*

The Muskingum County Engineer's Office announces that salt supplies are becoming low. The county salt storage is only at ten percent capacity.

County Engineer Doug Davis says that the shortage is not a comfortable situation to be in. There is a concern about how much salt to use on the roads for upcoming events because there are still 1,200 tons of salt to be delivered to Muskingum County that have been ordered, with no time frame of delivery. The salt comes from Lake Erie in Cleveland.

We are facing several problems at once. One problem is that over the past several weeks, any abundance of salt supply that we have had is dwindling quickly. When several snow storms hit us back to back, it does not allow enough time for the salt supplier to replenish our salt supply.

The Engineer's Office utilizes state bid pricing and contracting for their annual salt supply. Each year, we must provide a tonnage amount that is estimated to be needed. For snow events in October 2013 through September 2014, the contract order amount was 3,500 tons. We must order 80 percent of that, and are guaranteed no more than 120 percent of 3,500 tons (4,200 tons). The Engineer's Office has ordered their maximum amount of 4,200 tons, and was told by the salt provider that the county's situation will be evaluated within the next few weeks.

There are three possible scenarios that could result from the evaluation by the salt supplier. MCEO will be allowed to order more salt at the same price per ton, at a different price per ton, or be denied salt for an undetermined amount of time. That timing could be for the rest of this winter, or until a new contract takes effect in late 2014. In past cases, the supplier has allowed a continuation of salt purchasing above the contract amount at the original price per ton.

Another problem is the cinder supply from the Conesville Power Plant has become almost extinct. MCEO has already been conserving cinders for a few years. Cinders, a bi-product of the coal-burning industry, provide grit and a heating element to the roads.

With what we are facing right now with the salt shortage, MCEO trucks will put their focus on main arterials, primarily asphalt roads, during snow events. A temporary adjustment to treating roads is the only option that the Engineer's office can do.

The salt will be used sparingly on roads. MCEO crews will continue to use some sand and cinders to supplement salt reductions. While the county is in conservation mode, only treating bridges, curves, hills and intersections will be main priority.

Each and every storm event is different. Varying temperatures of air and ground, the type of snow, wind, duration, and timing can all affect how his crews fight a winter storm. MCEO asks the public for the patience as our department deals with the material shortage. We feel our highway crews do an excellent job in response times and do the best they can to make our roads safe to travel.

Revenues are stagnant and material costs continue to rise, making it difficult to budget month to month, and year after year. Every dollar that is spent on snow and ice removal is less money spent to repair roads and bridges. It is an extremely difficult task to balance road and bridge improvements, while providing enough materials to treat winter storm events.

MCEO has a long term plan to have a large enough salt barn to store three years of salt supply. That way, this sort of salt shortage and interruption in service doesn't happen again. However, more planning and discussions will be necessary to make this a reality.