



A Day in the Life of a Snowplow Operator

When winter comes, men and women in communities throughout Alberta are ready to jump into their snowplows day or night to keep our 32,000 kilometres of provincial highways clear and open to traffic. They're called into action whenever there are three or more centimetres of snow on the ground or when highways become icy.

On bitterly cold winter nights or very early mornings while most of us are tucked snugly in bed, phones will ring and pagers will buzz to send hundreds of our neighbours, friends and family members out to work inspecting and clearing our highways and filing road reports for us so we can plan our trips.

Even the most experienced snowplow operators will admit that their working conditions are sometimes nerve-racking. They're usually the first and sometimes the only vehicles out on a stretch of highway in the dark, or coping with poor visibility caused by a blizzard, clearing snow and ice that would defeat other drivers. That's their job.

Despite their best efforts, sometimes Mother Nature gets the upper hand. When that happens, all of us who drive on our highways have an important role to play in keeping things safe. When heavy snowfalls, extended storms, high winds, extremely cold temperatures or freezing rain hit, motorists must plan ahead, drive according to the road conditions and give snowplows the room they need to get the job done. In particularly bad weather, avoid travelling if possible to allow maintenance crews to clear snow and ice more quickly and safely.

Each year vehicles run into working snowplows - tragedies that can certainly be avoided with careful driving. Remember that snowplows don't travel as fast as the usual flow of traffic but they will pull off the road regularly, when it's safe, to let other vehicles pass without incident.

To ensure a high level of service, Alberta's highway maintenance contractors are paid only for the work they do. Hourly rates are paid for snowplowing and ice control and contractors are paid by the tonne for the sand and salt they use. So what do snowplow operators do when the weather is good?

These trained professionals are also responsible for maintaining and repairing highway surfaces, highway signs, guardrails and bridges. They learn about using the latest technology to keep our highways safe. And, they also clear all sorts of debris, including dead animals, from highways. All year-round, they work with the provincial government on ways to improve response times, address specific regions of the province that pose maintenance challenges, and improve coordination with the Alberta Motor Association and the RCMP.

All in all, being a snowplow operator is quite a job!