

Highway Hazards in the Fall

With the arrival of autumn, the highway department faces several hazards this time of year.

Driving changes: With days being shorter, night driving increases. Morning driving will be done in complete darkness, creating limited sight distances and impairing vision. Due to daylight saving time, early evening driving will be riskier as the sun sets earlier. Make your drivers aware of these changes and prepare for them.

Roads filled with leaves: Even in dry conditions, leaves accumulating on the roadways create slick surfaces as vehicle tires cannot directly touch the pavement. During these times, it's important to stress to your drivers to slow down.

Drivers should maneuver around corners cautiously, expect a decrease in traction and avoid short stops, as a vehicle is likely to skid and lose control. Skilled drivers who are adept at driving in these conditions still need to drive defensively.

Indoor work increases: When the warm weather turns to cooler days, many work crews head indoors to the garage. This is a perfect time to assess the condition of the garage and improve housekeeping to accommodate more bodies. It is a good idea to:

- clean up the break room where the workers are likely to spend more time,
- improve lighting as more mechanical work is expected to be performed to prepare the plow trucks for the snow,
- clear out floor drains to better handle the melting ice off the trucks after plow routes,
- remove any floor obstructions which may cause trip and fall injuries,
- remove any accumulation of junk and debris to improve housekeeping, providing a safer, more enjoyable workplace,
- ensure your garage doors close tightly to prevent cold air entering work bays.

Heating unit maintenance: It is likely that your furnace or heating unit has not been utilized all summer and will need to operate full tilt in the coming weeks. Inspect the unit for proper operation. Ensure filters are cleaned or replaced for adequate ventilation around the intake vents. Confirm heating fuel is topped off and lines are intact with no leaks. Confirm exhaust fumes are vented to the outside and away from any workspaces. Boilers need to be inspected by a qualified boiler inspector every two years. A certificate of inspection needs to be located on or near the boilers.

Readying for winter operations: Fall season is usually a time when roadwork maintenance draws to a close and trucks are equipped with snowplows. You should review your procedures for mounting plows onto trucks and safely installing cutting edges on the plows is essential. Please review these policies with all applicable highway staff, as plows and cutting edges are heavy, cumbersome items that can cause serious injuries if they fell onto an employee. Severe leg and foot injuries have been reported during plow and edge mounting.