

Winter costs slash road repair budget

GENESEE COUNTY
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GENESEE COUNTY - Drivers may have to endure crumbling county roads awhile longer.

Harsh weather and high prices for petroleum products this winter has the Genesee County Road Commission planning cutbacks in summer maintenance projects to make up for the increased winter spending.

Efforts to repair guardrails and patch or replace small sections of roads, along with other regular maintenance projects, will be reduced.

"We're going to provide the same type of services, there's just going to be a curtailment on what's available and when we can do it," said John Daly, the Road Commission's manager-director. "We won't be cutting out any one thing, but there will be an impact across the board."

Soaring diesel fuel and asphalt costs and cuts in funding for roads are the culprits, Daly said.

The unusually snowy winter also played a part because plows and salt trucks were operating more often than in previous winters.

About 85 percent of the commission's fuel budget has been spent already, including \$433,000 on diesel in January and February.

The biggest impact of the cuts will be on subdivision streets, rural roads and other areas with less traffic, Daly said. Crews also will spend fewer days during the week repairing roads, and weekend and holiday work may be saved only for emergencies, he said.

Roads with the most dangerous or potentially damaging potholes will be repaired, Daly said. But, drivers still may have to deal with some of the shallower pavement pits.

It's something Keisha Chandler, 20, isn't looking forward to.

The Flint resident said she spent nearly \$1,000 to repair the damage potholes caused to her car about three years ago.

"It's upsetting," Chandler said. "I was driving 25 (mph), and it still did it."

Daly said drivers should travel at lower speeds on some roads to allow for the pulverized pavement.

"The bad part of it is, it doesn't mean that the work doesn't need to be done, it just gets postponed to some point in the future where you assume you'll have enough money," he said.

Other communities may face similar predicaments.

Swartz Creek already has exceeded its budget for snow removal, said City Manager Paul Bueche. Now the costs to keep the roads cleared and patched could come out of money normally set aside for maintenance projects.

But he assures residents that the city's potholes will be filled.

"We're going to have less money in the grand scheme of things for major repairs," he said. "The ripple effect of that is profound."

He said he's not sure when the city's residents could see the effect of this season's costs.

"Whether it's this summer or summers to come, it's hard to determine," Bueche said.