

Rising salt prices may leave Michigan with more hazardous roads

2009-11-03 17:52:44

(NEWSCHANNEL 3) – Heavy early snowfall, combined with high salt prices, led to a salt shortage in the winter of 2008, and with heavy budget cuts across Michigan, many fear we could see a similar scene in the coming winter.

The Michigan Department of Transportation already has some salt stock-piled, but they are estimating that salt prices will increase by more than 20 percent in the coming winter, prompting the agency to tell drivers to prepare for changes in winter road maintenance.

Baking at Mackenzie's in Kalamazoo begins while many are still sleeping, 1:00 am. Deliveries start at 5:00 am, even in the winter, when roads around Kalamazoo are often snow-covered.

"We want to be safe," said John Mackenzie of Mackenzie's Bakery, "I don't want anyone to get hurt, we're also dealing with fresh product that's got to be there on time."

For the coming winter, M-DOT is again trying to get the most out of its maintenance budget, which is about \$85 million statewide.

Priority routes like US-131 and I-94, as well as the priority two M routes will get cleared constantly, but those on secondary roads may see two-track conditions. Drivers that Newschannel 3 spoke to say they'll just adjust.

"I know how to handle it, I just take it easy, don't get excited," said Pat Shepard.

"Just like rural roads, dirt roads, just try to avoid those if I can," said Kenny Alvarez.

M-DOT says its budget for snow removal has stayed constant, but costs for salt and gas to put in its plows continue to rise.

"Hopefully people aren't going to notice a difference," said Nick Schirripa of M-DOT, "we may not be out at two in the morning when you're sleeping, but we'll get out there at 4:30, five o'clock in the morning before you hit the road to get to work."

That time frame is still when Mackenzie's is delivering its baked goods and breads, and so John Mackenzie believes that M-DOT's changes could wind up costing him more in the coming winter.

"We anticipate we might have to start earlier or just change our delivery schedule slightly," said Mackenzie.

M-DOT estimates that efficient use of salt and sand and an emphasis on safe winter-driving techniques saved the state about eight million dollars last winter.