

Clearing the roads on a budget

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VAN BUREN COUNTY, Mich. (NEWSCHANNEL 3) – Michigan's budget problems have put many county road commissions in a tough spot, forced to make tough decisions.

Inside the main salt barn at the Van Buren County Road Commission, they have almost 3,000 tons of salt left to get them through the winter.

During a typical winter storm, about 30 drivers will cover 1,300 miles of roads.

Van Buren is like many other counties in West Michigan, with the road commission working with fewer employees and smaller budgets. State money from the gas tax and car registration has fallen for six years in a row.

January seemed mild for a Michigan winter, but the road commission still spent \$300,000 dollars.

To get the most from his drivers, the director of the Van Buren County Road Commission prefers to pull them off the roads at night.

“They're far less efficient after they've been out there all day and then some,” said Larry Hummell, “then to try and run out there in the darkness, start them out fresh in the morning, if it's going to be dark, at least they'll be fresh.”

With the forecast calling for the storm to last into Wednesday, plow drivers in Van Buren County are preparing their trucks Tuesday night, and the first wave of plow trucks is scheduled to hit the roads at about 4:00 am. The priorities for the trucks are Red Arrow Highway, Blue Star and the other interstate connectors.