

## **Strategic Salt Reserve/State Highway Maintenance**

### **THE CITIZENS OF NORTHERN WISCONSIN REQUEST**

That the Department of Transportation work with the Northern Counties to develop a plan to develop a ready reserve of rock salt that will insure that no winter will ever compromise public safety.

### **BACKGROUND**

Northwest Wisconsin is known for its winter weather. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014 the first major snowfall hit the northwest region with snowfall in excess of a foot to be common place. Iron County received 50 inches in a 24 hour period and received in excess of 7 feet of snow in snowbelt areas. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Dane County reported a high temperature of 58 degrees F and a low of 34 degrees F with 0.04 inches of rain.

Winter in Northern Wisconsin begins early and ends late. No one understands the challenges of winter more than the residents of Northwest Wisconsin. Whether from a community standpoint or that of an individual, we understand that preparing for winter requires planning as well as lining up the resources to deal with the particular hazards that winter presents. Failure to do so can have serious consequences. Local governments in Northwest Wisconsin recognize that public safety hinges on their ability to maintain our transportation system during adverse winter weather.

By all measures, the winter of 2013/2014 was one of the most severe in history for the entire state of Wisconsin. Resources of County and Local governments were stretched to the breaking point to clear and maintain our highways, roads and streets. A key resource for maintaining our roadways is rock salt. There is virtually no way to de-ice a roadway without this product. The salt needed for State Highway Maintenance is furnished to counties by the Department of Transportation (DOT). By spring of 2014, most northwest counties had depleted their salt inventories. Some counties ran out of material and those that hadn't were on the verge of total depletion by winters end.

The DOT sets salt inventories by means of averaging winter usage over several years. The DOT policy is to furnish enough material for an above average winter, but that policy does not adequately address winters beyond the norm. From our viewpoint, the policy also does not support long term preparation for such events, since when a more normal winter occurs, subsequent salt orders are reduced to maintain the inventory at the level determined by averaging. If during times of low usage, salt acquisition was maintained at a set level, a reserve would be created that would insure adequate resources during time of great need. It would reduce the volatility of salt prices that almost always occur during times of shortages. A ready reserve would reduce the DOT's vulnerability to high salt prices brought on by regional or national shortages.

We believe that the current approach to maintaining salt inventories by the Department of Transportation could lead to the compromising of public safety in our region. We request that the Department of Transportation work with the counties to develop a plan to develop a ready reserve that will insure that no winter will ever compromise public safety. Fiscally, it should also protect the Department of Transportation from shortage driven pricing that always occur in times of scarcity, as was evident in the latter parts of the 2013/2014 winter season.

The plan for a strategic reserve is simple. Purchase salt to be placed in the inventory annually at a rate higher than what is dictated by an averaging approach. Stockpile this additional material over several years in existing county facilities presently available to accommodate the material, creating a strategic reserve. From a public safety and fiscal management basis, this plan for a strategic salt reserve is sound and practical.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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