

Department of Transportation: Drivers urged to give crews more space as 13 Wisconsin county snowplows struck this winter

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Following 13 separate incidents involving vehicles striking county snowplows, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and the Wisconsin County Highway Association (WCHA) are urging motorists to give snowplows plenty of space while crews work to keep roads safe during winter weather.

“Road and weather conditions can change quickly during Wisconsin winters and snowplow operators brave winter’s worst to keep our roads safe and passable,” WisDOT Secretary Kristina Boardman said. “We all want it to make it safely to our destination, so let’s take it slow on the road and please give space to snowplows.”

According to WCHA, 13 county highway department snowplows have been struck so far this winter. Serious incidents have occurred in Calumet, Marinette, Portage, Shawano, Waukesha and Wood counties. In many cases, snowplows are struck from behind, highlighting the need for drivers to remain alert and adjust their driving behavior in winter conditions. The crashes resulted in vehicle damage and forced several plows out of service, reducing the county highway department’s ability to clear roads efficiently.

“Every time a snowplow is hit, it puts operators at risk and takes critical equipment off the road,” WCHA Executive Director Patrick Vander Sanden said. “These crashes are preventable. Drivers need to slow down, stay back and be patient.”

Snowplows travel at slower speeds to effectively apply liquid brine or road salt and

clear the lane of snow and ice. Following too closely or attempting to pass an active plow puts drivers – and plow operators – at serious risk. Snowplows have flashing amber or green warning lights to increase safety, enhance driver awareness and improve visibility of maintenance vehicles.

Drivers are reminded to:

- Watch the road ahead, avoid distractions and leave room to brake, especially in slick conditions.
- Most traffic crashes in winter are caused by drivers going too fast for conditions.
 - Posted speed limits apply when travel conditions are ideal.
 - Slow down when roads are slick or visibility is reduced.
- Give space and stay at least 200 feet behind a working snowplow. If you can see the plow's mirrors, the driver can see you.
- If you must pass a snowplow, be careful. Snowplows often create a cloud of snow that can obscure vision. Road conditions in front of the plow are likely worse.
- Don't be over-confident if you operate a four-wheel or all-wheel-drive vehicle. Those vehicles still require a considerable distance to stop on slick roads.
- "Know before you go" with [511wi.gov](https://www.511wi.gov) or the free 511 Wisconsin mobile app to check road conditions, live video from traffic cameras and possible incidents.
- During major winter storms, postpone or cancel your trip. Stranded motorists and vehicles become hazards that interfere with snow removal efforts.

For more than 100 years, Wisconsin has maintained a unique partnership with the state's 72 county highway departments. During the winter, county highway workers keep interstate, U.S. and state highways safe by snow plowing, salting and applying liquid brine. WisDOT works closely with Wisconsin counties year-round to establish best practices and test new tools for safety and efficiency.