



Request for City Council Committee Action From the Department of Public Works

Date: February 18, 2003
To: Honorable Sandra Colvin Roy, Chair Transportation & Public Works Committee
Referral to: None

Subject: Update on February 3 – February 5 Snow Emergency Event

Recommendation: Receive & file

Previous Directives: None

Prepared by: Michael Kennedy, P.E., Director, Field Services Division

Approved by: Brian Lokkesmoe, P.E., City Engineer, Interim Director of Public Works

Division Director's Signature

Presenters: Michael Kennedy, P.E., Director, Field Services Division
Gail Plewacki, Director, Communications Department

Financial Impact (Check those that apply)

No financial impact - or - Action is within current department budget.
(If checked, go directly to Background/Supporting Information)

Action requires an appropriation increase to the Capital Budget

Action requires an appropriation increase to the Operating Budget

Action provides increased revenue for appropriation increase

Action requires use of contingency or reserves

Other financial impact (Explain):

Request provided to the Budget Office when provided to the Committee Coordinator

Background/Supporting Information:

This report is submitted to provide a general assessment of the first Snow Emergency of the 2002-03 season.

Highlights:

- Greatly improved communications (web site, 348-SNOW, media requests)
- About 7,670 tags and 1,580 tows (slightly fewer than normal)
- "Until fully plowed" policy was a new concept that provided parking relief and we are working

to improve

General: The snowfall began Sunday mid-day and was essentially finished by Monday morning, February 3, about 9:00 a.m., with a total accumulation of about 6" (an additional 2" fell on Wednesday.)

Public Works began snow and ice control activities with the on-duty staff on Sunday afternoon. The night shift was called in early (7:00 p.m.) to continue plowing driving lanes on all major arterial streets. The Monday day shift (7:00 a.m.) continued this effort through out the day. Because the snowfall had ended, they were also able to begin to provide "center cuts" on many residential streets before the first phase of the Snow Emergency parking restrictions went into effect at 9:00 p.m. Monday night.

Alley plowing of our 4,000 alleys started at 8:00 a.m. Monday, about the time the snowfall ended, and was essentially complete by the beginning of the Snow Emergency parking restrictions at 9:00 p.m.

Public notification: The decision to declare a Snow Emergency was made early Monday morning. By 9:00 a.m., steps were taken to notify all major media. The 348-SNOW hotline (including Spanish and Somali hotlines), the city Web Site, and the City Cable Channel were updated. A Snow Emergency e-mail alert was sent to 8,400 e-Subscribers (over 2,000 more than last season).

The 348-SNOW telephone hotline hardware had been completely replaced, upgraded and moved to a new, more stable location, and was untested under peak demand. There was a 1.5 hour downtime on Monday afternoon due to technical problems. The problem was identified and corrected. The system handled approximately 43,700 calls in the three days of the Snow Emergency.

The number of visits and page views on the public web site increased dramatically during the Snow Emergency period. The site had been significantly reworked to make improvements for this year and the Snow Emergency update feature was untested. There was a small technical glitch in the update procedure Monday morning but this was quickly solved. There were 1,794 visits to the "Snow Parking" information on the first day, 9,715 visits on the second day and 3,304 visits on the final day. This compares to 50-150 visits per day preceding the event.

Outreach: The Communications Department was very supportive, including a "Love the snow – Hate the tow!" media event on Tuesday. Public Works was involved in 11 interviews with various media.

Public compliance with the parking rules seemed relatively good the first night, poorer than average on Day 2, but seemed to improve again on Day 3. There were about 7,670 tickets issued, and 1,580 tows. These data are slightly lower than historical averages. The number of cars ticketed has always greatly exceeded the City's capacity to tow them. It is important to realize that even if the number of tickets in the future is decreased - the number of tows is not expected to decrease. The compliance with parking restrictions would need to increase by over 80% in order to reduce the number of tows.

"... until fully plowed" rule: Many people who took advantage of this new rule. The newness of the program created some confusion on the part of the public, the City staff, and the Hennepin County Hearing Officer.

Public Works has begun addressing these concerns. We are already working with our staff and with our enforcement people to clarify our internal procedures. We are also working closely with

the Communications Department to improve the City's external message in defining "until fully plowed."

SnOasis lots: There was some usage of this parking alternative. The University of Minnesota SnOasis lots had a total of 75 users, the Hyatt Ramp had 27 users, and the Center Village lot had 2 users. There was no observable difference in compliance from the view of the plowing and enforcement staff. This was not expected because these lots are in some of the highest, on-street parking demand areas of the City. (Also, the service is only available the first night and not during the days – only one of the three phases.) On the bright side, certainly, anyone who took advantage of this option did not get ticketed or towed during the first night and as with all new initiatives, this program should grow as it matures. We will continue to promote this program in conjunction with the Communications Department.

MinnStat pilot project: More data will be available regarding a variety of performance measures that are being compiled for the pilot MinnStat program that is looking at Snow Emergencies. The final data is being compiled. It is intended that a complete MinnStat report will be presented to T&PW Committee after the end of the snow season.

C: Gail Plewacki, Director, Communications Department