

Stressing the importance of safety on winter roadways

By Tara Knutson

The wind, snow and ice that engulfed Clark County in a Christmas storm this year wasn't quite a repeat of the storms that came with Christmas 2022, but it gave all local drivers a quick reminder of the perils of winter driving.

Ice storm warnings were added to the Christmas morning magic, sending many holiday travelers on a nerve-racking trip, doing their best to safely arrive at family holiday gatherings.

"South Dakota winters are rough, and drivers need to be prepared," stated Clark County Emergency Manager Dave Lewis. "You need to have your vehicle in good working order during the season." His tips included maintaining your gas tank level above the halfway mark at all times and have a fully stocked winter survival kit with food, water, extra winter clothing and an auxiliary cell phone charger in your vehicle.

Lewis emphasized, "Drivers need to be well informed of road conditions and weather conditions. If you get into trouble on the roads, it puts lots of people into motion to come and rescue you. The situation may not be safe for those coming to rescue you."

"If you get into trouble on the roads, the best thing you can do is call 911," added Clark County Deputy Sheriff Lindsay Stiefel. "Drivers can get disoriented in adverse weather conditions, and 911 resources can pinpoint exact locations. This allows law enforcement to focus searching to a specific location," she explained.

If there is a medical emergency and a resident needs to get to a hospital, Stiefel reiterated, "Call 911. As emergency responders, we have a lot more resources available to you to the hospital safely. If we have to, we can even dispatch a snowplow."

Both Emergency Manager Lewis and Deputy Sheriff Stiefel recommended referring to the county's social media accounts. Both departments often post pictures of road conditions and update weather reports online with real-time updates.

If drivers continue to ignore travel advisories and go onto the roads, they are subject to a ticket from law enforcement. "If normal personnel wouldn't try drive in these road conditions, we will ticket you," Stiefel explained.

Overdriving road conditions can result in drivers finding themselves sliding off the road and into the ditch. It can also result in a new traffic offense on a driver's record. "Also, if you are going too slow in a snowstorm and end up getting rear ended, you may also get a ticket."

Young, inexperienced drivers and elderly drivers tend to have more difficulty handling the challenges that come with winter road driving. "Take pause before allowing teenagers and inexperienced drivers out on the winter roads, especially if the road surfaces are covered with ice and snow," said Stiefel. "The elderly may have vision impairments and slower response times, but they are also usually much more prepared for the winter conditions than younger generations," she stated.

Stiefel stressed, "If we can't get to you, you're spending the night right where you are. Keep your exhaust pipe clean of packed snow and utilize the supplies in your winter survival kit. Make sure you stay with your vehicle."

Clark County Highway Superintendent Ryan Eggleston reported that Clark County has five hundred miles of roads to maintain during the winter months, so it may take some time for help to reach stranded motorists.

After a winter weather event, the county maintenance crews head out to do their part to keep motorists safe during their com-

muting. Plows are stationed at strategic locations throughout the county to allow for the crew to cover the county more quickly. A few of these locations include Raymond, Vienna and Willow Lake.

Eggleston makes an initial road check before the crews are dispatched. He, along with other county officials, such as the sheriff, also decide when to suspend road maintenance efforts if the weather becomes unsafe for the crew. The county crew works hard to "break everyone out with at least one path before we stop for the night. There are times we keep going until 8:00 at night if we have to," reported one of the maintenance workers.

Clark County Commissioner Chairman Wallace Knock reported that the time frame for getting all the roads plowed depends on the specific winter weather event. "If the wind blows from a particular direction, certain roads will be impacted more so than others," he explained.

If we have to get out of the plows and into a payload to work specifically on one area, our time increases to get the miles covered," confirmed the maintenance worker.

"As of the end of December, there are no plows on the trucks yet. They are still working on hauling gravel and other tasks related to county road maintenance," Knock added. "We don't have a separate budget for snow removal. It is all one budget for 'road maintenance,' so the lack of snow hasn't made an impact on the budget," he explained.

The 511 Traveler Information Service is another resource motorists have to ensure safe winter travels. This free service, provided by the South Dakota Department of Transportation since November 2002, provides real-time travel information, including road conditions, closures, construction, incidents and weather forecasts via the SD511.org website, mobile apps for Android and Apple devices and the 511 phone number. Winter road conditions are updated by SDDOT maintenance staff three times daily or as conditions change. Images from roadside cameras positioned throughout the state can also be viewed. In May 2023, when the SDDOT celebrated 27 years of 511 services for South Dakota travelers, there had been 25 million website user engagements on SD511.org.

"SD511 has some areas of improvement needed though," admitted Clark County Emergency Manager Lewis. "It's only designed to update state highway conditions. When the interstates are closed due to adverse weather conditions, Google maps or other GPS programs on travelers' phones redirect them to secondary roads. These roads are just as bad, if not worse as far as safe driving conditions are concerned," Lewis said.

"We want to adjust the app to be more pertinent to the county level and to allow county personnel to update information," he added. "I can't physically close the road. I technically don't have authority to close the gate, so travelers can still proceed down the road even if we deem it not safe," he explained. "This would be another avenue for us to decrease the nonlocal travel onto county roads. As a result, it will keep the travelers and the first responders out of potentially dangerous situations."

The goal is to divide Clark County in half running north and south of U.S. Highway 212 to make the road advisories even more specific for local residents. Lewis would also like to see it upgraded to allow city police, county sheriff departments and emergency management to update the information on the site. "The idea of these improvements started cir-

culating through the state in August, but the work isn't complete yet to implement the updates," explained Lewis.

David Huft, SDDOT's Intelligent Transportation Systems Program Manager in Pierre confirmed the time frame. "The planned improvements won't take place until January at the earliest before we can start implementing the training to local individuals. A lot of computer programming must be completed beforehand," said Huft.

The changes will allow officials of counties and tribes in South Dakota to post no travel advisories and road closure notices on SD511. SD511 maps will highlight the affected counties and tribal areas, and advisories and closures will be communicated to third-party navigation providers like Google.

"The motivation for the improvements was last winter when the state sustained two bad blizzards before Christmas, resulting in deep snow and lots of stranded motorists," Huft continued. "This situation was very taxing on local emergency services with all the winter rescues. Rescue crews were hearing the same response from stranded motorists, 'My phone told me to go here.' We want to create a way for counties to be able to post their closures and no travel advisories."

After SD511 is updated, local personnel will have to be trained to use the technology. "The training will be a quick online session. Counties and tribes must commit to updating the information promptly. That's part of the deal," Huft reported. "Right now, 47 counties and five tribes have agreed to post updates, but we are encouraging the remaining 19 counties and four tribes to enroll."

"Once it rolls out from the state, we are ready to start using it," assured Lewis. "This is another way we can keep residents safe, especially during the winter months."



Nevaeh Rusher competes at S.D. Snow Queen Festival

Clark High School senior Nevaeh Rusher, back row center, competed in the South Dakota Snow Queen Festival over the weekend in Aberdeen. Snow Queen winners included: Miss Congeniality - Faith Fliels, Groton Area; Second Runner Up - Jayden Bender, Britton Area; First Runner Up - Morgan Sumption, Frederick Area; 2024 Snow Queen - Olivia Hadrick, Faulkton.

Photo by Bremer Photography

Legislative cracker barrel to be held in Clear Lake

Deuel County Republicans is hosting a public event on Saturday, January 20 at the Clear Lake Municipal Building.

At 10:00 a.m. there will be a

legislative cracker barrel. Senator Wiik, along with Representatives Sauder and Deutsch plan to be present to give a run down of state legislative activities. They

will also field questions from attendees.

All residents of S.D. Legislative District 4 are invited to attend.



Clark Elementary School participated in Clark's Day of Giving, putting on a Penny War for all of the classes to compete in. Above are the winners of said penny war, the Clark Elementary second grade students.



They raised the most money and received a pizza party as a reward from the members of the Clark Area Community Foundation.

Submitted photos

Clark area participates in National Day of Giving

ByCarolynn Olson

The Clark Area Community Foundation, Clark Lions Club, Clark Rotary Club and local churches participated in the fifth annual Clark Area Day of Giving on November 28, 2023. The Clark Area Community Foundation challenged all the local businesses to participate, and for every donation that was made they would match up to \$5,000. The Clark Area Community Foundation was able to meet that goal.

The National Day of Giving was created to unleash the power of generosity by giving to those in need or to charities. Non-profits and charitable organizations usually participate in end-of-year fundraisers.

The Clark Lions Club hosted a pancake feed Sunday, November

19 and raised roughly \$1,137. The Clark Rotary Club and Clark Area Community Foundation hosted a burger feed, and local churches put on a bake sale. Together, they were able to raise roughly \$2,179.

To get local students involved, Clark Elementary School had their classes compete in a Penny War. It started Monday, November 6 and lasted until Friday, November 17. The second grade class raised the most money and got rewarded with a pizza party provided by the Clark Area Community Foundation. Their class also won the Penny War last year as first grade students. This year, the total earnings from the elementary were over \$1,700.

Last year, roughly \$22,000 was raised during Clark Day of Giving. The Clark Area Community

Foundation gave back over \$8,000. This year, \$28,115 was raised!

Support from the community plays a crucial role in events like fundraisers. "What a great community we live in, so generous to be willing to support and help areas in need," stated Clark Area Community Foundation president Gayle Wookey.

"A special thank you to the Congregational Church and other churches for all their donations, to the Clark Elementary students for participating in the penny war and raising over \$1,700 and the Lions Club for putting on the pancake feed," Wookey added.

All of the proceeds raised each year stay within the Clark community. The funds raised will go to support organizations including: the local school lunch pro-

WEATHER

Robert Cole - Official Weather Observer

	HI	LO	PR
Jan. 9.....	20	5	0.12
Jan. 10.....	15	4	0
Jan. 11.....	21	-4	0
Jan. 12.....	2	-6	0
Jan. 13.....	-2	-21	0.01
Jan. 14.....	-17	-23	0
Jan. 15.....	-11	-19	0
2024 precipitation to date	0.19"		
2023 precipitation to date	0		