



Say it Ain't Snow: A Behind the Scenes Look Into How NJDOT Handles Winter Weather



Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti

Keeping New Jersey's interstates and highways **open, passable, and safe** during a winter storm is a responsibility that we take very seriously at the New Jersey Department

of Transportation (NJDOT). Our state experiences each of the four seasons—often to the extreme, and winter weather can be especially unpredictable and harsh. That is why we are **always prepared for the unexpected**. We hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.



Pictured: NJDOT crews at the Bedminster Yard load salt into their trucks to prepare for a winter storm event.

Most people don't realize, or even think about, what it takes to keep roads safe and passable during a winter storm. They see our spreading and plowing trucks on the road, but don't get a chance to see what goes on behind the scenes. Coordinating the efforts of multiple departments, divisions, contractors, etc. is a tremendous undertaking that our team does very well. I would like to give you a look into the inner workings of NJDOT during a winter

storm event. I hope you will find it informative and interesting.

It all begins with the weather forecast. The forecast we receive not only tries to predict future weather conditions, but also includes information like ground surface temperature and rate of precipitation, which helps us determine the impact on pavement. This type of information is extremely valuable to us. For example, if an

overnight snow shower is predicted but the surface temperature is above the freezing mark, the snowflakes will melt on impact instead of accumulate. This information helps our decision makers determine our plan of action.

So, let's say a winter snow storm is in the forecast. NJDOT would **quickly** organize a conference call that includes our senior leadership team as well as any staff involved in

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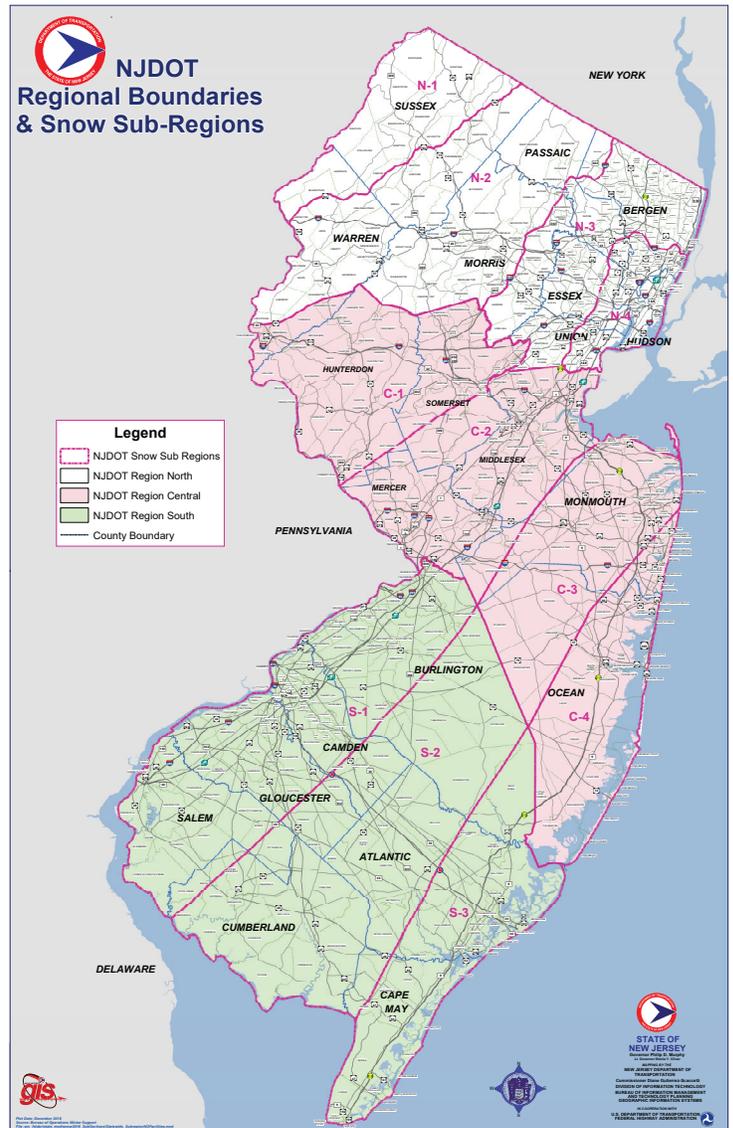
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decision making. Our highly skilled team of professionals then determine an activation plan based on the current information. The forecast would be **constantly monitored** throughout the day—adjusting our plan as the day progresses. During the call, each of our regions (North, Central & South) determine if or when they will open their dispatch centers and yards, and if need be, what time spreading and/or plowing trucks will be dispatched.

For large scale storms, we would coordinate a second conference call with our partner agencies: New Jersey State Police, NJ Transit, South Jersey Transportation Authority, and New Jersey Turnpike Authority, to discuss our coordinated efforts to keep roadways safe and passable. Our goal is to **effectively communicate** so that our partner agencies can successfully carry out their plan of action and vice versa.

The next step would be to open our emergency operation centers one hour before our crews and contractors are scheduled to report. This is done so our dispatch center can get online, take inventory, and get weather updates from our Central Dispatch Unit. Once our crews and contractors arrive to the yards, they make sure their trucks are **loaded, fueled, and ready to go**. Then our dispatch unit will assign them to their designated routes.

Our DOT crews make up only 20 percent of our winter fleet, the remainder are contractors. The relationship NJDOT has with its contractors is **critical**. We can't do



Pictured: This map is used by NJDOT during winter events and separates the state into regions and snow sub-regions, based on typical winter weather patterns.

what we need to do without them. We rely heavily on the contracting community and are grateful for everything they provide and the work they do.

Once our crews and contractors are dispatched, they work around the clock in 12-hour rotating shifts. All of NJDOT's trucks and contractor's trucks are in constant communication through radio, sharing new weather updates as we get them—ensuring the **best possible coverage** throughout the state during the storm. Meanwhile, our crews are also clearing fallen trees and securing areas where power lines have fallen so no one is harmed.

Our crews do whatever it takes to keep the roads clear. **Safety is always our number one priority.**

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I would like to remind anyone traveling on our interstates and highways during a winter storm to please slow down, use caution, and if possible, avoid driving altogether so that our crews can clear the roads safely. **If you don't have to drive, stay home.** That is always the safest option.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to read this and please feel free to share it with your colleagues. If you

have any questions about any of the information in the newsletter please feel free to contact NJDOT's **Office of Constituent Relations** at **609-963-1982**.

I wish you all a happy and safe new year.

Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti
Commissioner

