

WINTER SERVICE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In response to the number of questions and comments we have received from residents, businesses and visitors throughout East Lothian about our winter maintenance service we have collated these in a "Winter Maintenance Service" frequently asked questions section.

These question and answers have been provided to give an indication of what happens in winter weather conditions within East Lothian Council; they are not intended as being a statement of policy. Each day is different and the Council has to be able to act accordingly

We would advise anyone with a question related to road and pavement gritting, snow clearing or any winter maintenance related question to look over the questions and answers before getting in touch directly with winter maintenance query. Your question or one very similar may have been asked by somebody else.

ROADS AND PAVEMENTS

East Lothian is responsible for providing a Winter Maintenance Service on adopted roads throughout East Lothian Council (ELC). It is the Council's aim to provide an effective and efficient winter maintenance service within the financial constraints and resources available that will allow the safe movement of pedestrian and vehicular traffic appropriate to the prevailing weather conditions.

The primary salting road network is made up of the major routes where the majority of vehicle movements take place and also includes accesses to hospitals, ambulance stations, fire stations, other emergency service establishments, railway stations and schools

We also deal with footways on a priority basis. Given our limited resources, footways are not normally pre-gritted. In ice and snow, footways leading to schools, hospitals, health centres and shopping areas are treated first, along with those where a lot of people walk. Main routes to residential areas follow, with footways within housing areas being treated as resources allow.

1. Why can't you grit every road?

The adopted road network in East Lothian is almost 1000km long and with the limited resource we have available it is not feasible to treat all roads. Therefore, in order to achieve our objective it is recognised that a priority treatment system is required. Initially we treat our **Priority 1, Primary Salting Routes** which accounts for approximately 52% of our roads.

Where possible, we treat Primary Roads before ice forms. When it snows, these important routes are treated first. Once primary routes have been completed, we then treat **Priority 2, secondary routes** and finally what are classed as **Priority 3, tertiary and minor routes**, such as those in housing estates.

In severe snow conditions over long periods it should be noted that all the available resources will be concentrating on keeping the **Primary Routes** cleared and therefore no timescales will be given for the clearance of lower priority routes.

2. **How does ELC decide when to treat our roads?**

ELC receives weather forecasts from the Met Office specifically for the ELC area on a daily basis - a 24 hour forecast and a 2 to 5 day forecast. The 24 hours forecast is updated if there are any changes. In addition to this, a morning and early evening summary are also sent by the Met Office as well as a hazards forecast.

Our main priority is to keep Primary routes free from ice and snow and allow the safe movement of vehicular traffic appropriate to the prevailing weather conditions. To be most effective, the gritting should take place before ice forms or snow settles. Anticipating these conditions, and reacting correctly, depends on a mixture of local knowledge and experience, good local weather forecasts and an awareness of the current road condition e.g. is it wet, dry, previously treated or not etc.

3. **Do you undertake gritting of the A1 Trunk Road?**

No, the A1 is maintained by BEAR Scotland on behalf of the Transport Scotland.

4. **I want to request a road be treated for ice and snow? How do I do this?**

Call 01875 612818, but be aware that the treatment priorities set by the Council will be followed and it may be some time before your request can be attended to.

5. **When it's icy it's difficult to get my car out of my street, can you grit this?**

There are limitations to the service the council can offer, **Primary Routes** are treated and cleared of ice and snow first and then we move onto **Secondary Routes** and finally **tertiary and minor routes** which include residential areas, cul-de-sacs. It is worth noting that some residential areas, cul-de-sacs do not carry through traffic and problems can often occur with parked cars or the gritters cannot get access to reverse out, so it maybe some time before we can attend to these areas. We would advise drivers and pedestrians to take care when using non Primary routes.

6. **I'm a cyclist - what about me?**

We would advise that you travel to the road conditions and make yourself aware of the Primary routes and try and use these routes if at all possible.

7. **I have fallen due to the ice, what are you going to do about it?**

Footways do not normally receive pre-treatment within ELC and will not be treated as matter of course. We follow a priority system for footway treatment - footways within main towns are our first priority and then we move onto other areas. A road or pavement that has been treated with salt can still be icy in parts. It is advisable to use common sense and travel (or choose not to) when necessary.

8. **There are a lot of elderly people here. Why don't they get priority?**

Priority has to be based on greatest use to keep main thoroughfares open, for example access to hospitals and schools. We will do our best to prioritise locations where we know there are older people with a serious illness or disability; however, we would also encourage people to look out for their neighbours in extreme weather

9. Will you grit my footpath, I am elderly and need 24hr access as the ambulance comes twice a week etc?

Footways do not normally receive pre-treatment and will not be treated as matter of course. However, if there is persistent severe weather, requests of this nature will be prioritised and included in the footway treatment schedule which will be controlled by the duty officer on call.

10. Salt bins – how can I get one?

We currently have over 900 salt bins placed at strategic locations across ELC. We are not able to have a salt bin on every road or street - it just isn't feasible or practical - we could never service and maintain that number of bins. We can consider placing some additional bins out on the network and if we receive a request by a member of the public, the location will be assessed and if it meets the criteria for the provision of a salt bin we may allocate the bin to that location.

11. The bin in my street is empty when will you re-fill this?

We inspect and fill all of our salt bins in the autumn. After that we rely on the public to advise if a bin needs to be re-filled and we endeavour to re-fill these as soon as possible. If there is snow, the bins will only be re-filled if staff and equipment become available to undertake the work. The salt should be used very sparingly, as it does not aid grip but is supplied to assist in preventing the formation of ice and melting of snow. It is provided for use only on public roads and pavements only.

12. Can I call to the council depot to collect salt/grit?

No, we are not able to supply salt/grit to people visiting the council depots. You can buy salt/grit from most DIY stores, when the weather is really bad it is best to check by telephone that they have stocks available. If you can't get hold of salt/grit try some sharp sand to aid with grip on icy paths and driveways. Our depots are very busy and we would ask members of the public not to come to our Depot as it is not safe for people to be walking around amongst the heavy plant and machinery.

SALTING/GRITTING

13. Why is it called gritting?

Although most of us call it gritting there is in fact often no grit involved. What we spread on the roads in East Lothian is 6mm crushed rock salt. We spread salt from the back of gritters which is why it's commonly referred to as gritting. In particularly harsh weather, we have used a salt/grit mix where we mix 6mm stones (grit) in with the salt, this helps with traction and to break up any thick ice.

14. How does the Salt work?

Pre-cautionary salting or Pre-gritting is the term used when we go out and pre-treat the primary routes with salt prior to the temperatures falling close to or below zero. Water freezes at 0°C, but salt stops water from freezing until -6° to -8°C. The salt works best when it goes into a solution, which is why we rely on the tyres of vehicles passing over the top of it to crush the salt onto the road. This then forms a solution with a higher de-icing capability.

15. How do gritters spread the salt?

Rock salt is spread out of the back of gritters by a spinning device, usually symmetrically along the width of the gritter.

The rate and speed of spread is controlled by an electronic system in the cab of the gritter. This allows the driver to use different settings and information is fed back to the driver via an LCD screen in the cab. Where temperatures are to fall close to or below zero we would spread salt typically at 10 grams/sqm below this and if snow is forecast with accumulations or snow starts to fall and form we would spread salt between 20-40 grams/sqm

Our drivers are trained to use this system to adjust the width and the angle of delivery according to the kind of road and the conditions. A gritter will have the beacons flashing when it is spraying grit.

If you find yourself behind a gritter please keep well back, be patient and do not overtake unless necessary and safe to do so.

16. When do you start gritting the roads?

Our winter maintenance service starts at the end of October and runs through to end of March each year. This can be extended at short notice should weather conditions so necessitate out with this period.

17. Why are the roads not gritted when I can see there is frost on my car?

We take action when road surface temperatures are at or below freezing. Roads retain heat and do not cool as quickly, so frost on a car or even air temperature can sometimes be misleading. Gritting will usually take place when temperatures are forecast to reach 0°C or below and there is likely to be water present to form ice.

18. Do you undertake a 24hr service?

Yes, our team is on standby 24hrs a day during our winter maintenance period. We try to maintain a network of roads throughout the 24 hour period by applying treatments of salt to combat the effects of freezing temperatures which cause frost and ice to form on the road surface - this network is our Primary Salting Network.

During prolonged snow conditions our teams will undertake snow and ice clearing on a shift basis over a 24hr period.

19. I'm not on the primary gritting route but have an emergency. Can you come out and grit my road?

If we receive a request for assistance from a member of the public or from our colleagues in the emergency services this will be passed to our teams who will assist as soon as practicable.

20. I past a gritter lorry and it was not gritting, why is that?

There are a number of reasons for this and these may include:

- The lorry may have used up all its salt and is travelling back to the depot to get reloaded
- It could be travelling to the start of a section of a route to be treated.

- It may just be ploughing to remove snow first before it then spreads salt
- It could have a problem with the salt spreading equipment and be travelling back to the depot for repairs.
- In severe weather, once priority routes have been treated, gritters are often sent out again to patrol and salt as necessary.

21. Why is my cul-de-sac not gritted regularly?

There are limitations to the service the council can offer, **Primary Routes** are treated and cleared of ice and snow first and then we move onto **Secondary Routes** and finally **tertiary and minor routes** which include residential areas, cul-de-sacs. It is worth noting that some residential areas, cul-de-sacs do not carry through traffic and problems can often occur with parked cars or the gritters cannot get access to reverse out, so it maybe some time before we can attend to these areas. We would advise drivers and pedestrians to take care when using non Primary routes.

22. I was told gritters were coming to grit my street, what caused the delay?

Parked vehicles stopped our large gritters from accessing your street. Remember, gritter drivers are normally alone, and may well be working in the very dark early morning and in very poor weather / visibility. The gritters are large vehicles and cannot easily reverse and so vehicles are that are stuck or badly parked on roads can cause problems for access – resulting in some streets becoming inaccessible to gritters.

Also if the gritting has to take place at busy periods, e.g. rush hour on a morning or evening this can slow things down and the gritters may become stuck in traffic.

23. Is there anything I can do to help myself at home?

Be aware of the local forecast and road conditions by listening to the radio, watching the TV or using the internet. Take precautions to grit/clear your own paths/driveways where appropriate and clear snow from your car before using. If your drive is usually affected by snow and ice get some salt supplies in advance. We have over 900 grit bins and chances are there is one near you.

SNOW CLEARING

24. What happens when snow is forecast?

When snow is forecast salt is spread on the roads to slow the rate of snow settling. The main difference between treatments for frost/ice and snow is that for snow the salt spreading rate is increase. For snow to melt the salt needs to be mixed with the snow to form brine and traffic movement helps this process. If the snow becomes hard packed this process takes longer and traffic conditions can then become a problem, particularly on hills.

25. Why do your snow ploughs push all the snow so that it blocks driveways, parked cars, pavements and other roads?

Unfortunately, there's very little choice about this if we are to keep roads open. If snowploughs went back and cleared entrances as well, this would slow down the snow clearing process and potentially prevent us from clearing other roads. This becomes more of a problem when we have prolonged periods of snow and where temperatures remain below freezing. The only way of disposing of a build-up of snow is for there to be

a thaw or for excavating equipment and LGV Lorries to remove snow for disposal elsewhere.

26. Why have cleared the pavement on one side only?

By gritting just one side of the footway we are able to move quickly on to other areas on our footway priority. We clear sufficient space so that users of wheelchairs, pushchairs and prams can use the pavements. By not clearing the whole pavement we are able to treat all the priority areas rather than just some.

27. Do you expect people to clear snow and ice from their own street?

With any heavy snowfall, or very icy conditions, it's impossible for the Council to treat everywhere at once. And where the severe weather is prolonged, we have to maintain priority routes. We encourage people to take responsibility for their own area and do what they can to help, especially for vulnerable neighbours.

28. Will legal action be taken against me if I clear my pavement and someone slips on it?

The advice from the UK Government is: "There's no law stopping you from clearing snow and ice on the pavement outside your home or from public spaces. It's unlikely you'll be sued or held legally responsible for any injuries on the path if you have cleared it carefully. Follow the snow code advice

<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/barometer/advice/your-home/the-snow-code>

29. What is an Extreme Weather Event?

An extreme weather event will be considered to be an event where continuous snow is forecast and likely to give significant accumulations in excess of 10cm over a substantial proportion of ELC. The snow will also be expected to remain in untreated areas for a prolonged period due to low temperatures before a natural thaw disperses it. During periods of extreme weather and heavy continuous snowfall when roads and footways are affected by significant levels of lying snow, priority will be given to primary carriageway routes and primary footpath routes. Gritters and footpath resources will be deployed on these specified routes continuously until satisfactory snow clearance has been achieved before resources are deployed to any secondary routes and **tertiary routes**.

SCHOOLS

30. Why are some schools open, partially open and some schools closed?

The decision to close a school rests with the head teacher of the school. Any decision to close is taken in the interest of children safety, having assessed the local risks and having consulted, as appropriate with the local authority and any school transport operators.

Some of the issues that schools take into account include:

- conditions in the school itself,
- the capacity of the school to ensure the health and safety of students whilst in school, and
- the ability of parents, students, staff and school transport services to safely negotiate local road conditions to reach the school.

While schools in an area will normally try to co-ordinate their decisions, the individual circumstances can vary between individual schools in close proximity and may lead to different decisions being taken by schools.

31. How will Parents be contacted is a school closes.

If your child's school decides to close on the grounds of safety, the school will make all efforts to contact you. Each school will have its own procedure for this and we would advised you check and establish what this is. ELC website and local radio or the school's website may also be used to alert parents to a school closure, but check with school first.

32. Who is responsible for gritting the primary school and playgrounds?

Within the school boundary the treatment of winter conditions would be the responsibility of our colleagues in our Education. This would normally be carried out by school janitors on a day to day basis if there was resource available.

33. What if a school bus can't transport pupils to school due to the road conditions?

School bus operators have complete discretion to cancel or vary a route given the local weather conditions in order to ensure pupil safety. In the case of a morning journey if the driver decides the conditions are unsafe - it is at the discretion of the parent whether they decide to transport their child to and from school.

GRITTING MYTHS

We would urge all road users to take extra care if temperatures are well below freezing and that at these temperatures below -5°C, grit is not as effective.

The Council continues to grit the routes it treats but there are some commonly held myths about gritting.

34. Whatever the temperature salt will melt snow and ice

Untrue - the effectiveness of salt used on roads significantly decreases below -5°C and does not melt ice below -9°C

35. Once a gritter has put salt on the road, it will melt ice

Untrue - spreading salt is only the start of the de-icing process. It needs movement and crushing by traffic for it to start to be effective. When traffic volumes are low, roads can remain icy for some time often until there is a significant traffic flow.

36. Salt on fresh snow will melt this quickly

Untrue - salt only works when the snow is less than 40mm deep and traffic can move the salt around. Snow ploughs will endeavor to plough snow to this depth before spreading salt.