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Practical guidance for winter

New practices have revolutionised the way winter maintenance is carried out

RLG update

● The UK Lighting Board has made a strong case for relaxing the current requirement to light traffic signs.

The Board noted the announcement on 18 September by former Transport Minister, Norman Baker, where he said: "I have decided to retain the current lighting requirements for safety-critical signs such as those relating to low or narrow bridges, regulatory terminal signs including 'Give way' and 'No entry', as well as for stop signs, two-way traffic signs, and motorway entry, exit and gantry-mounted signs.

By contrast, once the successor to Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) comes into force in 2015 I have decided that it will no longer be necessary to light signs, either for lane closures and contraflow working at road works, or those mounted on bollards in street lit areas. I know the latter will be welcome news for many traffic authorities.

"In addition, traffic authorities will have discretion over the lighting of warning signs, regulatory cycle signs and those within 20MPH zones and limits."



David Davies, chairman of the National Winter Service Research Group and principal maintenance engineer at Lincolnshire County Council answers questions on the new Appendix H Winter Service Practical Guidance, as published in 'Well-Maintained Highways'.

What is the NWSRG?

The National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) was set up as the National Salt Spreading Research Group in 2000. In 2010 the Group changed its name to the NWSRG. In the same year the NWSRG Practical Guide for Winter Service was produced for its members.

In 2010 David Quarmby led an independent review of winter resilience and a report was published. One of the recommendations was for the NWSRG to be invited on to the UK Roads Board.

Who is involved with the NWSRG?

The NWSRG is made up from representatives of national and local authorities, along with contractors and suppliers.

What work has the NWSRG undertaken?

New winter practices have come into the UK over the last 10-15 years which have revolutionised the way winter maintenance has been carried out. These were researched by the NWSRG and informed the content of the NWSRG Practical Guide. In 2010, the NWSRG held discussions with Mr Quarmby and his review team. The Roads Board and then the UK Roads Liaison Group agreed that the NWSRG Practical Guide should be incorporated into the 'Well-Maintained Highways Code of Practice' by updating the winter section (Appendix H).

Has the update to the Appendix already been tested in the industry?

Yes, the Practical Guide is based on data and feedback over many years from both field trials and experiments at the TRL test track. Members of the NWSRG, including the Highways Agency, have been using information from the Practical Guide for some years.

What are the main changes in the new winter guidance?

The update to Appendix H incorporates the information in the NWSRG Practical Guide. The most significant shift with the publication of the new Appendix H has been the change from two spread rate tables – which were the advice in 'Well-Maintained Highways' before the new edition – to 12 tables. The 12 table format provides more detailed guidance allowing an authority to follow different tables on different parts of their network depending on equipment, salt and storage.

Could the 12 tables be complicated for authorities to follow?

The guidance in Appendix H has decision making matrices and flowcharts to help authorities. Essentially the 12 tables are derived from three main elements: salt distribution, traffic levels and salt loss immediately after spreading. These are then assessed and based on



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Modernising fleet and vehicles will more likely happen in stages

the spreading technology (dry salting, pre-wet salting or treated salt spreading) so that the right treatment matrix is identified.

When was the update published?

It was launched by Norman Baker MP, former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Local Transport Minister at the recent Cold Comfort winter conference held on 18 September.

What are some other key messages?

Calibration and storage are two other key messages worth covering.

Firstly, calibration: this should be a minimum conducted prior to and mid-way through the winter season. If a driver thinks something has gone wrong then it should be looked at and if an authority acquires new salt

the gritters should be calibrated accordingly.

Secondly, storage: an authority could have the best gritters in the world with the best calibration, but without proper storage it is equivalent to putting diesel into a sports car that takes petrol. Ideally salt should be stored in barns or domes and if an authority has to keep the salt outside it should be sheeted professionally.

Will the new guidance be onerous for local highway authorities to implement?

The guidance and recommendations contained within Appendix H relate to national best practice and it is recognised that local circumstances, including financial and other resource constraints, as well as political influences can vary widely across the country.

Authorities and operators will need to take all of these factors fully into account when devising and revising their winter service policies and plans. Some of the recommendations and practices will, if adopted, also take a number of years to implement. For example, it is recognised that in certain cases it could take up to 10 years or so for a major programme of change to be fully implemented.

Ten years is a considerable period of time...

Modernising the fleet and vehicles could take up to 10 years as no authority is likely to have the finances to purchase 30 new gritters in one go, for instance. It would be more likely that this would happen on a phased programme of implementation. Acquiring new salt barns or depots could also take a number of years, with the planning consents and capital investment required.

Will authorities have the budget to take on board the new guidance?

We are trying to help authorities develop a sustainable service that incorporates best practice, it is an 'invest to save' situation. For instance when an authority invests in new equipment such as new spreaders, they will be able to spread on a lower salt basis that will reduce the salt usage and therefore reduce costs. Reduced salt usage also has environmental benefits.

What benefits should the public see?

A more resilient network. David Quarmby picked this up in his report about a more efficient and effective use of resources, particularly in regards to salt spread rates.

What support can authorities get for implementation of the new guidance?

There have already been workshops sponsored by the industry. There is also the NWSRG Peer Review service – the NWSRG have already undertaken this for Roads Service Northern Ireland. The NWSRG is just starting to implement its winter decision making course on behalf of the UK Roads Board.

And presumably by becoming a member of the NWSRG?

Yes, that's right. Members receive best practice guidance before it is made more widely available, can take part in trials and influence research. Additionally, being involved with the group can help demonstrate a commitment to improving winter service operations, and this could be useful in court situations if an authority has to defend its actions in regards to any highway related winter issue.