

UK ROADS LIAISON GROUP

UK Roads Liaison Group
CIHT, 119 Britannia Walk
London N1 7JE

info@ciht.org.uk, www.ciht.org.uk
tel: 0207 336 1555
fax: 0207 336 1556
web: www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org
twitter: www.twitter.com/ukrlg

UKRLG Chairman: John Dowie

UKRLG Board Chairmen

Roads: Matthew Lugg (outgoing)
Lighting: Dana Skelley
Bridges: Mike Winter
Network Management:
Derek Turner

Senior Policy Officer

Justin Ward
email: justin.ward@ciht.org.uk
tel: 0207 336 1584

RLG news

- Jim Barton will stand down from the UK Roads Liaison Group at the end of March this year as he retires from Transport Scotland.
- Matthew Lugg has stood down as Chair of the UK Roads Board, after six years in the role, to dedicate time to his ADEPT Presidency and delivery of industry's Highways Maintenance Efficiency Programme (HMEP).
- HMEP has been established by DfT with support from ADEPT and the UK Roads Board with the aim of identifying and disseminating best practice for delivering efficiencies.
- The UK Roads Board is supporting ADEPT's research into the characteristics and extent of damage to road surfaces following severe winter weather.
- The UK Lighting Board is conducting a survey to gain a view on changes to local authority lighting. Some authorities are switching off their street lighting, others are trimming (reducing lighting time) or removing lighting in certain areas. The UK Lighting Board survey aims to find out what is happening across the UK and help to build up a picture of the experiences, benefits and disadvantages of such approaches. To take the survey see: <http://svy.mk/ffVZqR>

Winter service advice brings performance uplift

Successive winters of salt shortages have prompted reviews and guidance from the UK Roads Liaison Group and others – bringing a general improvement in highway winter service operations.

Lots of snow, stranded motorists and shortages of salt may feature in UK winters to come, as they have over the past two to three years. No highway authority can keep roads or footpaths clear once the snowfall becomes a blizzard, particularly on high and hilly ground, regardless of how much salt is thrown down. What they can do is plan effectively and engage with the public openly, as some authorities have done during the current winter.

In his December 2010 audit of the 'winter resilience' of England's transportation systems, RAC Foundation chair David Quarmby has found "most people are now doing most of the things they should be doing. Many have implemented recommendations, engaged communities and distributed the new snow code", he says.

The code to which Mr Quarmby refers is the public advice on clearing of footpaths published on the Government's Directgov website – encouraging residents to clear snow from public areas without fear of legal action. The UK Roads Liaison Group (UKRLG) contributed to the creation of this advice and has played a pivotal role in recent winter service developments overall.

In summer 2009 UKRLG published its report for the Department for Transport (DfT) on lessons learnt from the severe weather of February that year, then accordingly updated the Well-Maintained Highways code of practice. A year later – after a second winter of salt shortages – David Quarmby produced his winter resilience reports (see box far right) with a list of recommendations which led to UKRLG's Winter Service Guidance for Local Authority Practitioners, published in October 2010. This is supplemented with further advice for local authorities on 'precautionary and post treatments including revised salt spread rates'.

Supply, storage and application of salt understandably account for a lot of the pages in UKRLG's guidance and Mr Quarmby's winter resilience reviews. The salt shortages of successive winters from 2008 to 2010 are well documented. Authorities throughout the UK were caught out by the severity of the 2008/09 winter and the fact that salt shortages became even more critical in 2009/10 can be attributed, at least in part, to many thinking the weather of the previous year was a 'one-off'.

There was also not a lot of time, after UKRLG's 2009 report, for implementation of its recommendations before the 09/10 winter. During the following summer and autumn though, with political pressure mounting, preparations were better – borne out by generally improved winter services and salt shortages not reaching



David Quarmby has confirmed certain authorities are operating to a high standard

critical this year. Even Scotland, which has just experienced its most severe winter since 1910, has remained well stocked with the help of imports from overseas despite spreading over 500,000t of salt so far this year.

Degrees of success vary across the UK, but David Quarmby praises governments' rapid response to his own and UKRLG's recommendations, reinforced by the governmental Salt Cell, which includes UKRLG members.

The Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) adverse weather and resilience manager Laurence Madges is a member of the Salt Cell. He says: "In Wales we have been helped by close working relationships between the Assembly, Welsh Local Government Association, unitary authorities and salt suppliers. All were surprised by the severity of the 2008/09 winter, but we've since put in place measures to conserve and make better use of salt.

"It's been a steep learning curve for all concerned, developing and implementing latest best practice. With UKRLG's new recommendations and other measures in place, as salt shortages become critical, we've been able to quickly respond jointly with the unitary authorities."

Wales did not build up a national salt stock ahead of the current winter, due to haulage logistics difficulties in severe weather, Mr Madges says. Instead, WAG encouraged unitary authorities to increase their stocks and facilitate mutual aid with regional stock piles where appropriate. "We then had a relatively short distance for mutual aid to travel between authorities when needed," he adds.

This partnership strategy was combined with conservation measures which included consideration of residual salt on roads after repeated applications. As a result WAG and Wales' unitary authorities kept supplies at acceptable levels this winter, despite prolonged snowfall and exceptional freezing conditions in December last year.

"Salt supply is potentially still a long term issue," David Quarmby says, "but strategically a more robust programme of lower spread rates has been rolled out and discussions are being held with the main UK salt suppliers about increasing their throughputs in a way that does not leave them undersold or overstretched."

Overall, good planning is key, Mr Quarmby says. In England, some authorities, such as West Sussex, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire, have engaged well with communities and shown leadership in engaging effectively with parish and district councils. "North Yorkshire has a brilliant website for managing people's expectations and giving out useful information and lots of ideas," Mr Quarmby says.

"Some are doing the job to a high operational standard, getting out with salt spreaders quickly enough. Others are not. Generally, those that manage winter service well, do so in line with their local emergency resilience planning that they have to do anyway under the Civil Contingencies Act.

"This introduces a way of doing things that will pick up weaknesses in planning and if the emergency services are also involved, better operations result. Authorities are not obliged to plan their winter services this way, but it helps and it works."

Glossary of UKRLG winter service key guidance documents:

- Lessons from Severe Weather February 2009 <http://bit.ly/dgKwgU>
- Winter Service Guidance for Local Authority Practitioners <http://bit.ly/c2Nj5W>
- Recommended Precautionary Treatments and Post Treatments Including Revised Salt Spread Rates <http://bit.ly/h9IsQo>



Wales has benefitted from close relationships between the Assembly Government and local authorities

Salt research gets a stronger footing

David Quarmby's review of 'The Resilience of England's Transport Systems in Winter' was commissioned by DfT in March 2010. An interim report was published in July last year, focusing on roads and improvements to winter service that could be implemented in the short term, followed by Mr Quarmby's full review in October – including rail and aviation – and his audit to assess progress in December. UKRLG contributed to the overall process and subsequently took many of Mr Quarmby's findings forward into development of its Winter Service Guidance.

Following David Quarmby's recommendation, the National Winter Service Research Group (formerly the

Salt Spreading Research Group) has been brought under the umbrella of UKRLG as a sub group of the UK Roads Board. The research group has gathered substantial data from studies of salt spreading techniques over the past 10 years or so, using equipment supplied by the private sector, but with voluntary funding from a small number of authorities.

Mr Quarmby noted the importance of the group's work for developing recently revised salt spreading guidance. Through the UKRLG board structure, the information gathered will be made more accessible to all and further research directed and supported as appropriate. David Quarmby's reports are at: <http://transportwinterresilience.independent.gov.uk/>

Spreading the word

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) has stepped up its winter service over the past two years, including efforts to make its operations as accessible to the media as possible to ensure the right messages get out. "We want the public to understand what we are doing," explains GCC's winter service team leader Jenny Wilks. "Our efforts have involved getting television news reporters into depots, making depot duty managers available for the 7am and afternoon drive time news bulletins and essentially trying to be as helpful to the media as possible."

Extensive public information on GCC's approach to winter service has been published on the council's website, including a map of routes that will be salted and content from the 'snow code' that advises residents and business owners on clearing snow from paths and driveways.

Gloucestershire was part of the steering group that led the UK Roads Liaison Group's review 'Lessons from

the Severe Weather February 2009' published in the summer of that year. GCC then increased its salt stock by over 2500t (53%) for the start of the 2009/10 winter season and built a 2450t capacity 'salt dome' storage barn in the North Cotswolds. Stocks were further increased in preparation for the current winter and as expected, a large number of treatments has been carried out again this season.

Gloucestershire is looking to further increase its salt storage capacity and is submitting planning applications for two additional barns; one in the Forest of Dean will cover the west of the county and the other, in the Stroud district, will serve the centre more effectively, if planning permission is granted.

Over the next six months, GCC will review its salt supply contracts. The council is also considering working with neighbouring authorities in the south west on collaborative procurement. The recent UKRLG guidance on salt spread rates means GCC will be

recalibrating its spreaders for next winter. The advice came too late to allow GCC to recalibrate for this winter, but the council is still focusing on salt conservation and efficiency.

The county has been engaging with the Highways Agency's 'snow desk' exercises; allowing the council participation in scenario planning with the HA, other local authorities and emergency services. GCC has made staff available for the meetings, as the council sees real benefit in being involved with the snow desks and carrying out winter service exercises.

The Big Society approach to public service appears to be in force: GCC has gained vital support from local community volunteers. Snow wardens and snow plough operators appointed by parish councils have helped clear snow and inform GCC about conditions in outlying villages. Refurbished snow ploughs have been made available to help farmers clear snow in rural locations.