



Winter maintenance

Information pack

This information pack was sent out to parish councils, councillors and other interested parties in November 2013. It contains:

- a summary of our Winter maintenance policy 2013/14
- answers to frequently asked questions, based on information from our call centres
- information on clearing snow and ice
- a list of facts, figures and myths, to help clarify all aspects of our policy
- a copy of our fact sheet on obtaining additional grit bins.

Please contact the Highways Contact Centre if you need further information.

Contact us

Phone: 0345 60 80 193
Email: highways@eastsussex.gov.uk
Twitter: @escicroads
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Winter maintenance

Frequently asked questions

1. Why is my road not gritted?

We can't grit all roads, but we have a list of our primary roads that we do grit, which gives priority to the busiest roads in order to avoid the most serious accidents. This includes the major A, B and about 75% of C roads, some 860 miles or 42% of the total road network. During snow and very severe icy conditions we treat an additional 200 miles of road (known as secondary roads), giving a total coverage of about 52% of our road network. Once the busiest roads are clear we give priority to roads leading to:

- hospitals, fire, ambulance and police stations;
- bus and railway stations and other public transport stations;
- main shopping areas, schools etc; and
- difficult sites (very steep hills etc).

Minor rural and urban roads are left to thaw naturally.

2. When is my road going to be gritted?

If your road is not on the primary or secondary road list it will not be gritted.

Our gritters treat the roads to try and stop frost and ice forming before temperatures fall below freezing. We schedule the gritting process based on the weather forecast. Where possible we try and plan the gritting operation to occur after the evening peak hours, or before the morning peak hours.

3. Can I see a map of which roads will be gritted?

We have compiled a map of roads that will be gritted during severe snow and ice. It will show the primary roads that will be gritted, and you can search by postcode to check the roads relevant to your journey. Some secondary roads may also be gritted, once primary roads are completed, but these are not shown on the map. You can find the map on eastsussex.gov.uk/winterroads

4. My road is on a steep hill leading to a busy junction. Why is it not gritted?

See question 1.

5. Why has one side of the road been gritted but not the side that my house is on?

The gritter only needs to drive along one side of the road, as the salt spreading mechanism is designed to deliver the salt across the full width of the road.

6. Why was your gritter going along the road but not treating it?

Gritters follow a detailed route, treating primary roads in a specific area. For maximum efficiency, the gritter will need to use some intersecting roads to get to the primary roads. It's not feasible to salt these intersecting roads as the gritter would not have enough salt to treat the primary roads.

The gritter may be empty and returning to the depot after completing its run.

When the gritter lorry is using its snow ploughs, salt is not always applied.



7. Why don't you grit pavements?

We don't routinely salt footpaths or pavements. We have to prioritise major roads rather than pavements to prevent the most serious accidents. Hand salting of pavements will only be carried out if staff and equipment become available, with pavements in main shopping areas and busy urban areas treated as a priority. We encourage householders and businesses to help themselves by clearing snow and ice from public areas near their properties.

8. Can we have a grit bin?

We currently have over 950 bins spread around the county. We do not provide additional grit bins. However, we are working with district and borough councils, residents' associations and businesses to review the locations of grit bins, particularly where these organisations may wish to purchase additional bins (see 'Getting a new grit bin', in this pack).

9. When will you fill the grit bin?

We inspect and fill all of our grit bins in the autumn. 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, and should not be used or transported anywhere else. We do not refill grit bins on demand.

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

If there is a real emergency and we are requested to provide assistance by the emergency services, then we will respond positively.

11. Why don't you grit all roads leading to schools?

See question 1.

12. Can I buy grit/salt from you? If not can you give me contact details for a grit supplier?

We do not provide salt to private individuals or businesses, unless the business or a residents' association has purchased an approved grit bin from East Sussex County Council. Rock salt can be obtained from some builders' merchants and DIY stores.

For further information on purchasing approved grit bins, see 'Getting a new grit bin', in this pack.

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Winter maintenance

Clearing snow and ice from pavements and public spaces

Householders and businesses in the county are encouraged to clear snow and ice from pavements and public spaces.

Will I be held liable if someone falls on a path I have cleared?

There is no law preventing you from clearing snow and ice on the pavement outside your property, pathways to your property or public spaces.

It is very unlikely that you would face any legal liability, as long as you are careful to ensure that you do not make the area more dangerous than before. People using areas affected by snow and ice have a responsibility to be careful themselves.

What can I do to help clear snow and ice from pavements and public spaces?

- Start early: it is much easier to remove fresh, loose snow rather than compacted ice that has been compressed by people walking on it.
- **Do not use hot water.** This will melt the snow, but can result in black ice, increasing the risk of injury.
- Be a good neighbour: some people may be unable to clear snow and ice on paths on or around their homes. Snow and cold weather can make getting in and out extremely difficult.
- When shovelling snow, think about where you put it, so that it does not block people's paths or drainage channels.

- Make a pathway down the middle of the area to be cleared first, so you have a clear surface to walk on. Then you can shovel the snow from the centre to the sides.
- Spread salt on the area you have cleared to help to prevent ice forming. Table or dishwasher salt will work, but avoid plants or grass as it may damage them. A few grams (a tablespoon) for each square metre you clear should work. The salt found in salting bins should mainly be used to keep roads clear.
- Particular care and attention should be given to steps and steep gradients to ensure snow and ice is removed. You might need to apply additional salt to these areas.
- Use the sun to your advantage. Removing the top layer of snow will allow the sun to melt any ice beneath; however you will need to cover any ice with salt to stop it refreezing overnight.
- If there is no salt available, then a little sand or ash is a reasonable substitute. It will not have the same de-icing properties as salt but should offer grip under foot.

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Facts, figures and myths

- It's not grit, but rock salt which is considered to be the best practice within the industry.
- Between 1 November 2012 and 31 March 2013 we used approximately 12,000 tonnes of salt.
- In an average year we would expect to use 8,000 tonnes of salt.
- We've started the 2013/14 winter season with 12,000 tonnes of salt in our depots.
- We don't buy salt directly. It is bought and owned by our contractor (Kier) and we pay for it to be spread on the highway. Typically, salt costs between £30 to £35 per tonne.
- There are two main suppliers of rock salt in the UK: Cleveland Potash and Salt Union, with a further supplier in Ireland.
- Kier buy the majority of their salt from Cleveland Potash, buying salt for East Sussex and several of their major highways contracts across the UK.
- We operate a fleet of 24 gritters, and keep three spares in case of breakdowns or accidents.
- Each gritter operates on a pre-planned route that takes approximately two to three hours to complete.
- Generally gritters are used when the forecast or conditions dictate. This can be in the evening or early morning, avoiding peak traffic flows where possible, to try to limit the likelihood of frost/ice forming on the road. It is for this reason that most gritting operations go largely unnoticed.
- In 2012/13 we used our gritters 89 times, which is about average for a normal winter.
- The winter maintenance budget for 2013-2014 is provisionally set at £1.59 million
- There are a number of fixed costs in providing the winter maintenance service, these are:
 - Leasing of vehicles £510k
 - Maintenance of vehicles £178k
 - Basic facility (depot management etc) £191k
 - Weather forecast/ice detection costs £30k
 - Snow fence (East Dean) £10k
 - Total fixed costs £919k
- When we salt, we pay the contractor based on the length of road each individual gritter covers when treating a scheduled route or snow route. This has to be funded from the remaining winter maintenance budget after deducting the fixed costs.
- The gritters are driven by trained Kier staff.
- Gritters are specialist pieces of equipment, but for eight or nine months of the year they are largely unused.
- Our gritters operate from six depots: Ringmer, Sidley, Heathfield, Maresfield (Mill Pond), Polegate (Mile Oak) and Cripps Corner.
- Salt is stored under cover and we can store up to 15,000 tonnes at our six depots.
- Rock salt provides no friction/abrasion, it simply prevents the formation of ice on the carriageway and aids the melting of snow and ice
- Salt alone doesn't melt snow, it relies on traffic to 'churn' the snow.
- Rock salt becomes less effective at temperatures below -5 degrees C.



- Rock salt is distributed at the rate of between 10g/sqm and 40g/sqm depending on the forecast and severity of the weather conditions.
- We treat 860 miles of highway, a mix of A, B, C and other roads, making up 42% of the total road network. This is one of the highest percentages of treated road networks for a highway authority in the South East:
 - West Sussex 40%
 - Kent 30%
 - Hampshire 26%
- We also treat an extra 200 miles of roads when it snows, bringing the total to 52% of our road network.
- There are approximately 950 grit bins distributed across the county.
- Most of these grit bins are owned by East Sussex County Council (ESCC). The remainder are the responsibility of parish councils.
- When it snows, snow ploughs are fitted to all gritters. However, snow ploughs don't clear all snow from the highway. Instead they operate approximately 75-100mm above the carriageway, to avoid damaging the road surface and the plough. When driven with ploughs attached, the vehicles have to be manned by two people.
- We have 20 local farmers and 7 local contractors who can be called upon to clear snow from rural roads.
- Gritting decisions are made based on detailed weather forecasts and data collected from our local weather stations across the county:
 - Ashcombe (near Lewes)
 - Eastbourne
 - Guestling
 - Mark Cross
 - Golden Cross.

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Winter maintenance

Getting a new grit bin

Can we have a grit bin?

The County Council will provide new grit bins where the costs are met by residents' associations, businesses, or the local parish, town or district council and there is a suitable location for the new bin. If you would like a grit bin please contact your local parish, town or district council in the first instance to find out whether they would be willing to provide one.

If your parish, town or district council agrees to your request, they will contact us. We will then review the request and, if approved, agree a suitable location. The bins can be located on the highway, private or local Council owned land providing the owner gives permission.

When the bin is empty, how do we get it filled?

New grit bins will not be refilled automatically. The owner or responsible person must request for a bin to be refilled by contacting our Highways Contact Centre, and making an advance payment. We will then arrange to the new bin to be refilled when we refill our own grit bins. In periods of high demand grit may be reserved for use on priority roads.

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How much does a grit bin cost?

Grit bin	£145
Installation and fill	£130
Total	£275
Additional refills	£75

The use of grit

Grit is actually rock salt. It works by lowering the temperature that water freezes at. It relies on the action of vehicle tyres to spread it over the road. It can be too cold for the grit to work - below minus 5 °C the effectiveness is reduced and roads can still freeze. Rain or snow can wash the grit away leaving roads prone to re-icing, so gritting should take place after the rain but before the water freezes.

Spreading grit safely

- Only spread the grit when there are no vehicles or pedestrians nearby.
- Wear bright clothing to ensure that you can be seen easily.
- Don't assume the road or pavement is safe just because it has been gritted.
- Look after the environment – use the minimum you can. A shovel full will be sufficient for 20-30sqm of road.