



City of Ketchum  
Public Works

## SNOW BUSINESS

The Ketchum Street Department maintains the streets in the winter per city of Ketchum resolution number 684.

The Street Department is required to plow snow from the streets when the snow depth reaches 3 inches and to sand the streets whenever conditions warrant. The procedure for afterhours is that Ketchum Police Department is responsible for monitoring street conditions and for contacting Blaine County Dispatch when our Street Department services are needed; Dispatch will in-turn call the Street Superintendent or on-call personnel to relay the need for services. If plowing is required the Street Superintendent will call out full time crew personnel, part time crew personnel and our contracted snow haulers. The city requires their full time crew personnel to live within a 30 mile radius to ensure a reasonable response time for winter requests; Full time crew personnel can usually respond to the Street Department facility within an hour of the initial phone call. Part time crew personnel and contracted snow haulers are allowed to live further south of the city, Richfield, Fairfield, Shoshone and Gooding are allowed. Their response time can be more than two hours depending on weather conditions. We are grateful for the help we receive from our winter part time crew personnel as it is getting harder to find capable help.

Ketchum residential streets are plowed by staff to the side of the road and the snow is stored in the city right-of-way. Property owners are responsible for clearing their own driveways and parking areas and are not allowed to place the snow in the city street. If we have good snow fall and residential streets start to narrow the Street Department will widen the streets as time permits.

Ketchum community core property owners are responsible for moving the snow from their sidewalks to the edge of the street just off the gutter area, but not in the travel lane. The city will then move the snow to the center of the street and haul it away as quickly as possible.

On the average it takes about 8 hours to complete our plow routes. If we are able to start plowing at 1:00 am we can usually have the city streets cleared and sanded by 9:00 am. However, several factors can affect this schedule: 1. amount of snow, 2. crew size, 3. timing of the storm and 4. The time at which the Street Department gets the call out to plow. The first two factors are self-explanatory, the deeper the snow the longer it takes to clear, and if we have missing crewmembers we have to double up on routes increasing completion times.

Factors 3 and 4 are big ones. If the snow level does not reach the 3" plow limit until 6:00am or if we don't get called out until 4:00am or 5:00am then things can get really ugly, especially if it is a big storm. We can plow residential areas during the day during a storm; however it will take longer to complete the routes due to parked cars and traffic. If cars are blocking the street and the plows cannot get through safely then that streets might not get plowed until the following morning.

Keep in mind that if a storm continues to drop snow that most streets only get plowed once during that day. For instance we can start plowing snow after three inches has fallen and while we are plowing an additional six inches fall, the start of the route would have six inches of snow on it looking like we didn't plow at all. During the longer storms we get many phone calls asking why the streets have not been plowed and most of the times the streets have been plowed at least once and will be plowed again if needed the following morning. We always do our best to run the routes again if time permits, however most of the times it makes more sense to wait a few more hours until all the cars are off the streets to run the routes the second time.

Our operators have multiple jobs, when they complete their plow routes they help out other operators with their routes, help with equipment maintenance, refuel equipment or help with snow hauling and sanding. An average snow day for our crew seems to be about 13 hours long, however 14 hour and 15 hour days are not uncommon. In order for our crew to run our residential plow routes twice in the same day it would take at least 16 hours. At this time our crew is too small to run the plows twenty-four hours a day, the sander is the only piece of equipment that is scheduled to run twenty-four hours.

Snow removal in the community core during the day is a totally different story. We have tried to move the snow around vehicles in the core and they get badly plowed in. Our plow equipment is 12 to 15 feet wide and visibility is limited. To date we have not found a way to safely negotiate our large snow removal equipment around the traffic in the core. Plowing snow in the core becomes extremely dangerous after 8:00 am. There is little we can do in the core during the day while it is snowing but keep the sand trucks going until we can come in at 1:00 am to clean up and haul the snow away.

In an effort to be as efficient as possible the Street Department winter staff and equipment is set up to handle an average 6" storm with snow being plowed from all city streets and snow being hauled from most critical streets in the core by 9 am. After a storm it usually takes several days to finish hauling snow and clean up. With one snow blower and 9 contract trucks we can haul about 675 yards of snow an hour. One average 6-inch storm could produce 18,000 yards of snow for us to haul, which would take about four days to haul away. Over the years we have had storms drop 24 to 30 inches in just one storm. Two feet of snow can produce more than 45,000 cubic yards of snow for us to haul, normally that much snow would take 9 to 10 days to haul. When we are able to use two snow blowers and 18 trucks we can cut the snow hauling time almost in half. We try to run two blowers when we can; if we are unable it is because of limited staffing or equipment breakdown. The time it takes to clean up after a storm and winter maintenance costs are directly related to the type of storm and amount of snow that falls each winter.

The Street Department's job of maintaining the streets in the winter can be very frustrating. Well-meaning private contractors and landscapers push or blow snow onto the freshly plowed or sanded streets causing the Street Department to go back and plow or sand it again. If we are not able to get back to that street the snow quickly packs and the travel lane is now snow packed, rough and not sanded. Every storm people push snow into the streets from private property causing the city to have to move it and haul it away. This practice costs the taxpayers money and just adds to the time it takes us to clean up. When people place their snow in the street, it quickly packs and creates a high spot in the roadway. The high spot might not be noticeable to most until the temperature warms up and the street turns to slush. They have now created a problem for themselves and anyone who travels on that street. What might have been 6 inches of slush is now 12 or 14 inches of slush, which makes it

extremely difficult for smaller cars to negotiate. So please be considerate to others and be responsible with your own snow.

Snowstorms during the day and large storms are a real challenge for cities to deal with; they push the crews and machinery to their limits. The Street Department's ability to safely and effectively maintain the streets during the day is greatly reduced due to traffic. We greatly appreciate your patience during these storms.

Our routes are very detailed and they take time to learn. It takes two to three winters before an equipment operator becomes proficient on the routes. We have experienced a higher rate of employee turnover the last few years and seem to always be in the process of training newer employees on equipment and plow routes. Ketchum Street personnel are unique individuals; with summer work consisting of several hundred tons of asphalt patching, considerable concrete work in addition to the daily routine work. Then winter comes along and requires our staff to continue providing regular routine work, and snow and ice control this can add many early morning and long shifts and never enough sleep. The job is very demanding and is not for everyone which is evident by the personnel turnover. Although our jobs are challenging we will always strive to do our best to provide a quality service for the city of Ketchum, their residents and business owners.

Any questions or concerns should be direct to:

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