



# Bulletin

## *WINTER IS COMING...*

With winter in full force, the Michigan Department of Transportation's Rail Safety Section would like to offer several tips regarding snow removal and salting at and around railroad crossings.

Please always remember:

When snow is piled high near railroad crossings, it can prevent gate arms from descending into their downward position and block motorist's view of railroad warning devices and approaching trains. Also, the force of snow hitting railroad warning lights can knock them out of focus, slower plow speeds can help prevent this.

Excessive applications of salt and chemicals used to de-ice roadways can result in the malfunction of railroad automatic warning devices. When salt and chemicals are applied on or near railroad crossings, railroad ballast can become contaminated and produce conditions where electrical signals carried through the rails short out, resulting in false activations of the warning devices. When this occurs, railroads may have to replace ballast or may place a slow-order on their trains, resulting in delays to motorists.

Plowing too close to railroad crossing surfaces can dislodge ties and damage rails, which can cause train derailments, damage to snowplows, and emergency road closures. MDOT invests millions in crossings replacements every year. Some of those replacements are due to nicks and gouges in the rail. These defects cause damage to the rail which could lead to breaks in the rail and train derailment, so they need to be replaced. **Snowplow blades should be raised slightly when plowing over railroad crossings.**

Attached is a list of helpful tips for snowplow drivers. Please share this information with the appropriate staff in your agency. Your efforts in addressing these serious concerns during Michigan's snowy months will help improve motorist safety. We appreciate all you do to keep our roadways safe!

Thank you for your attention and action to this important matter.



## TIPS FOR SNOW PLOWING/SALTING AT AND NEAR RAILROAD CROSSINGS

- ◆ **Reduce snowplow pressure and raise snowplow blades slightly when plowing over railroad tracks to avoid catching and/or gouging railroad materials with the snowplow blade.**
- ◆ **Avoid piling snow in front of railroad crossing warning devices, in areas that could block motorist view of approaching trains and under railroad gate mechanisms.**
- ◆ **Avoid piling snow in front of railroad bungalows/houses and railroad access roads parallel and adjacent to the tracks (railroads use these weekly/monthly to access their property & equipment).**
- ◆ **Reduce truck speeds when plowing around railroad crossings to help prevent damage to automatic warning devices (lights and gates) by the force of the snow hitting them.**
- ◆ **Do not pile snow on track, as this creates a potential damage to train equipment and causes derailments.**
- ◆ **Apply salt or gravel to railroad crossing approaches to assist motorists in maintaining adequate stopping distances. When possible, clear-off the railroad pavement markings on the roadway approaches.**
- ◆ **Never dump salt directly on railroad crossings. Salt causes circuitry wiring to short out, causing malfunctions to the lights and gates.**