

ON TRACK WITH MDT

Message from the Director

Montana is ringing in more than the New Year as 2005 begins. The new administration of Governor Brian Schweitzer and Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger means not only a new day for Montana, but many new faces in state government, including my own.

My path has crossed with a number of you over the years through my work in the transportation arena. I come to the Montana Department of Transportation from Oldcastle Materials NW Group in Kalispell where I was public policy advisor. Previous to that I was the president and ceo for Pack and Company in Kalispell for 15 years and spent eight years as the general manager of Highway Maintenance for Johanson Construction in Spokane.

As I begin my role as director of MDT, I look forward to building on the progress the department is making in promoting a safe, efficient transportation system in Montana. I also look forward to continuing, through this medium, the practice of keeping all informed of relevant issues.

One such issue is safe winter driving, especially in the presence of snowplows. Though our winter has been relatively mild, semi-trucks have hit four MDT snowplows.



Luckily, none of these crashes were fatal, but the financial costs of such collisions are huge as is the potential for a fatality.

Granted, it can be frustrating when coming upon a snowplow and all forward progress seems to be halted, but there are two simple tips to follow: slow down and be patient.

Snowplows travel at around 35 miles per hour to be as effective as possible with both sanding and clearing the road. When approaching a snowplow from behind, automatically slow down. Snowplows travel slowly and maneuver slowly, expect it.

The second tip is just as important. Be patient. Snowplows are generally operated in ten-mile segments. This means sooner rather than later, the snowplow will turn off the road. Be prepared, though, the road in front of the snowplow may not be as clear as the road was behind the plow.

How far is a safe distance to stay back from a snowplow? Far enough that visibility isn't inhibited by the cloud of snow the plow turns up and far enough, given the road conditions, that if the plow stops or turns, you, too, will be able to stop in time.

Passing a plow is a dangerous endeavor for all in the vicinity, and MDT does not advise it. A snowplow kicks up quite a cloud of snow, which not only limits visibility but can also be disorienting to the driver of the passing vehicle. This can quickly lead to a crash. In turn, the passing vehicle kicks up a cloud of snow that can limit the visibility of the snowplow driver and drivers of other nearby vehicles.

At MDT we are committed to providing a transportation system that emphasizes quality, safety, cost effectiveness, vitality and sensitivity to the environment. Everything we do is about that, including protecting those who travel Montana's winter roads, but drivers must do their part as well, so please keep these driving tips in mind.

I look forward to serving as the director for MDT and to "serving Montana with pride."

Sincerely,

Jim Lynch