

For Immediate Release
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Ferris Grounds Department continually battles snow, ice

BIG RAPIDS – Like all good plans, the program the Ferris State University Physical Plant’s grounds department has for campus snow and ice removal occasionally requires adjustments. And those timing and routing changes, often the result of severe weather, normally enable crews to stay on track in clearing roads, sidewalks and parking lots.

Of the 785-acre campus, 435 acres are maintained by the grounds department. That includes 56 acres of parking lots (73 lots with more than 7,400 spaces), 4.3 miles of roads (primary access or service roads) and 23 miles of sidewalk.

The campus is divided into seven zones, utilizing two of 13 staff members for each of six of the zones. When available, two student workers are assigned to each zone on a daily basis.

The department has available for snow and ice removal services: two large pay loaders; a backhoe; two dump truck units; four tractors; four half-ton pickups; and two salting/sanding units.

Snow and ice removal is a 24-hour, seven day a week job, according to Clare Kwant, superintendent of grounds, roads and walks. However, his crews shift into high gear when a significant snowfall hits campus.

A routing schedule is made for every piece of equipment and the crews work on a priority basis. First to be cleared are roads, sidewalks (handicapped routes are a first priority), commuter and staff parking lots, campus apartment sidewalks and lots, and residence hall storage (long-term parking) lots.

Public Safety is responsible for alerting the on-call supervisor in charge of the need to bring in staff for snow or ice removal. The on-call supervisor then makes the decision as to the number of staff that is required to respond to the current conditions. Workers can start as early as 2 a.m. They immediately clear the Public Safety staff parking lot due to early arrivals. The goal is to complete the other areas by 7:45 a.m. for the arrival of students, faculty and staff.

Kwant notes that problems can arise that complicate the snow removal operation. “We can have equipment breakdowns and some staff may not be available due to illness,” he said. Wet, heavy, deep or drifting snow also presents problems, as does unauthorized parking. Unpublished campus activities have resulted in areas not being completed on time or on a frequency basis, he added.

“We can accomplish snow and ice removal for all priority areas during the 2-8 a.m. timeframe, as long as the depth of snow does not exceed four inches and there are no mechanical breakdowns in the equipment used,” explained Kwant. “Any additional inch of snow results in one additional hour for the existing time period required to clean the campus of snow. Continuous snowfall during the day resulting in the compaction of existing snow by vehicles or pedestrians, or melting snow or freezing rain, creates a continuous problem for the Grounds staff.”

The removal program, which runs from Nov. 15 to April 1, is updated on an annual basis and can be altered during the winter season. In fact, for this and future winter seasons, the department is utilizing other experienced Physical Plant staff members to supplement regular



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snow/ice removal staff when the Grounds staff is not at full strength. Annual adjustments are made for changes in lot use, the number of lots occupied, equipment capabilities, handicapped student schedules, employee and staff needs, and differing efficiency standards.

The Grounds Department will respond to any special requirements requested by campus staff and students by calling the Physical Plant at 591-2920.

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