



Highway Maintenance Manual
Chapter 06 Winter Maintenance
Section 05 Road Classifications
Subject 05 Frozen Road Declaration

Bureau of Highway Maintenance
October 2022

1.0 Authority

When the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) determines that the state highways are frozen, to the extent that no damage to them may result from the transportation of peeled or unpeeled forest products cut crosswise (excluding woodchips) or abrasives or salt for highway winter maintenance in excess of the limitations under Section, [348.15](#), Wis. Stats., the department shall declare highways within areas of the state are eligible for increased weight limitations under s. 348.175, Wis. Stats.

The officers or agencies in charge of highway maintenance are responsible for making such a declaration. WisDOT's Bureau of Highway Maintenance (BHM) makes this declaration only for the state-maintained highway system. Local agencies with maintenance authority make a Frozen Road Declaration for county or local roads.

2.0 Procedure

1. As freezing temperatures begin to enter the state, the BHM Meteorologist begins monitoring frost models, frost tubes, and subsurface temperature readings to estimate when frozen road conditions will occur. Roads are declared frozen zone-by-zone when frost depth reaches eighteen inches (18") below the pavement surface throughout the zone.

2. As the estimated date approaches, the BHM Meteorologist reviews Roadway Weather Information System (RWIS) data and the Chief State Highway Maintenance Engineer or their designee requests frost tube readings from regional maintenance supervisors. Frost tubes should be checked on Mondays and Thursdays, unless otherwise directed, and reported to BHM until each respective zone is declared frozen. The BHM Meteorologist then notifies the appropriate regions that readings are no longer required.

3. On the first day that conditions warrant declaring a zone or zones as frozen, BHM publishes a declaration of frozen roads. Each declaration is in effect as of 12:01 a.m. on the 2nd day following the declaration. Wording of the declaration is as follows:

"The Frozen Road Period begins in Zone X [Day of Week, Date], at 12:01 AM CST. The Frozen Road Period will begin in Zones X and X when conditions warrant. The Frozen Road Period was already in effect in Zones X and X."

4. Mid-Season Thaw: Throughout the frozen road period, there may be periods of thaw when the ground immediately below the pavement structure is no longer frozen. In order to protect the pavement structure, the department may temporarily declare [Seasonal Posted](#) and/or [Class II roadways](#) restrictions. Each declaration shall be given a minimum 24-hour notice prior to becoming effective.

5. If at any time when the Frozen Road Declaration is in effect, and the department determines that the period should be ended, a declaration shall be provided. Each declaration shall be given a minimum 24-hour notice prior to becoming effective. Wording of the declaration is as follows:

"The Frozen Road Period ends in Zone X [Day of Week, Date], at 12:01 AM CST. The Frozen Road Period will end in Zones X and X when conditions warrant. The Frozen Road Period previously ended in Zones X and X."

6. All proposed BHM communication shall be reviewed by the following persons/entities in DTSD:

- a. BHM Meteorologist.
- b. Chief State Highway Maintenance Engineer.
- c. Chief, Freight Operations.
- d. DTSD Administrator's Office - Public Affairs.
- e. State Winter Operations Engineer.

Once reviewed in DTSD, the completed draft shall then be sent to WisDOT's Office of Public Affairs and the affected WisDOT regions, who will disseminate the declaration.

7. All declarations to frozen road conditions shall be published on the department's website, issued as press releases by the department's Office of Public Affairs and available via a recorded message at (608) 266-8417.
8. Additional information on this procedure can be found in the [Decision Process](#) document.

3.0 Distribution of the Frozen Road Declarations and Updates

The Chief State Highway Maintenance Engineer or their designee shall notify the following persons/entities regarding the declaration/removal on an annual basis:

1. WisDOT Office of Public Affairs.
2. Region Operations Chiefs.
3. Region Maintenance Supervisors.
4. Freight Operations Chief and Supervisor.
5. BHM Director.

The Chief of Freight Operations or their designee shall notify the following persons/entities regarding the declaration/removal on an annual basis:

1. WisDOT Division of Motor Vehicles - Motor Carrier Services Section.
2. WisDOT Division of State Patrol.
3. Great Lakes Timber Producers Association of Michigan and Wisconsin (GLTPA).
4. Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association.
5. Oversized-Overweight (OSOW) registered permit holders in WisDOT system database.