



Briefing 13/49 November 2013

# Strategic Salt Protocol and use of Red Diesel for gritting.

To: all contacts

## Key issues

DfT release protocol for management of Strategic Salt Stock  
The Note encourages local highways authorities to plan effectively for severe weather.  
Use of red diesel in any vehicle gritting rural areas signed off by HMRC.

## Strategic Salt Protocol

### 1 Introduction

The Department of Transport has issued 'Strategic Salt Protocol - Note for Local Highway Authorities in England'. This Note sets out the arrangements for allocation of strategic salt, if and when required, including the price. It is available [here](#).

### 2 Context

Following the recommendations of Quarmby's independent review into the response of England's transport system to severe winter, in 2010 the Secretary of State for Transport instructed the Highways Agency to build up a strategic stockpile of road salt to improve national resilience. As a result the Department has retained a stockpile of approximately 305,000 tonnes with a further 120,000 tonnes being held by the Highways Agency.

The Note highlights that local highway authorities have a responsibility to ensure they are adequately prepared for winter by maintaining sufficient salt stock. In the independent winter resilience report, it was recommended that local highway authorities implement a new resilience benchmark of 12 days/48 runs, as recommended by Quarmby, for pre-season stockholding for English local highway authorities. They should review their usage history and mutual aid or other arrangements to consider:

- a) whether there is a case for increasing capacity towards 48 runs if it is currently less than this, in addition to filling the capacity they have; or
- b) at what level to stock – at or above the 48 runs level – where the capacity exists to do so.

It goes on to state that the strategic stockpile is the salt of last resort, in the event of prolonged severe winter weather across the country and it continues to encourage local highway authorities to procure salt for their own networks in good time to ensure delivery, and not to rely on the strategic salt stock as the first point of call.

The Department also notes the changes to spread rates and draws attention to the wider guidance which the UKRLG has produced which provides information on a number of ways to reduce salt usage;

the new tables providing up-to-date guidance on choice of salt spread rates as well as the guidance contained within Appendix H of Well-Maintained Highways which was updated this year.

The Note goes on to encourage local authorities that may be running low on salt stock whilst awaiting a delivery from their salt supplier to consider mutual aid between neighbouring authorities. It states that if this causes problems the next step would be to contact the DCLG Resilience and Emergencies Division (RED) where officers will facilitate mutual aid.

The Note talks about the electronic web-portal which was developed to monitor local highway authority salt stocks across England, Scotland and Wales and how this will inform the processes for allocation of the strategic salt stock in England.

### **3 Arrangements**

A Winter Road Salt Network Group bringing together officials from the Department for Transport (Chair), the Devolved Administrations (both Scotland and Wales), the Highways Agency, Transport for London, LGA, ADEPT, the Met Office, the Cabinet Office and DCLG Resilience and Emergencies Division may meet to consider whether any authorities require access to salt from the strategic stockpile. The Group will also provide information, not advice or direction, to salt suppliers based upon returns provided by the Highways Agency, devolved administration and local highway authorities on salt stocks, estimates of future usage derived from Met Office weather forecasts and an assessment of the available market supply.

Suppliers will then decide on their weekly salt delivery arrangements. Prioritisation of who should be allocated stock from the strategic stockpile will primarily be determined by analysis showing which authorities require an amount of salt in order to bolster their resilience to a minimum capability threshold.

If an authority is deemed, following the Winter Road Salt meeting, as requiring strategic salt the Department will send the authority an offer of salt for purchase. Whilst they will be happy to accept a lower level of salt for purchase, they will not be able to exceed the quantity offered unless there are exceptional circumstances and authorities will be given 24 hours to accept the offer.

If an offer of purchase is accepted, the Department will send a confirmation sheet with the tonnage to be delivered and at the same time send this to the delivery agents working for the Highways Agency who will arrange for the strategic salt to be delivered to the authority depots. While they are unable to guarantee delivery timescales, authorities should plan on a prudent basis that deliveries may take up to 5 working days from confirmation of the allocation, although they expect the majority of deliveries to be made within shorter timescales.

The Department is unable to accept 'returns' once the authority has entered into a contract for purchase of the strategic salt.

The price per tonne of the strategic salt quoted in the Note is £65 per tonne excluding VAT for 6mm Salt to BS3247. This cost excludes haulage where the cost will also vary depending on location of delivery.

### **4 APSE comment**

APSE welcomes the establishment of a strategic salt stock as a short term approach to the potential problems of severe weather.

During the heavy snow falls of the past 3 years local authorities have kept roads and footpaths open on all but a small minority of occasions and all of these have been due to the rate at which snow fell

rather than a lack of planning. There has been collaboration between councils to ensure all have adequate levels of salt whilst the suppliers have provided salt whenever possible.

The concept of a strategic stock was introduced as a solution for some who had reduced stocks of their own or had no facilities to store it. This is not such an issue now as new storage facilities have been developed in many local authorities.

The most important point made by the Note is that planning is paramount and it is a point which appears to have been taken on board by local highways authorities over the past 2 or 3 years. Not only have they invested in extra salt stocks but have also bought new spreading equipment and storage facilities as well as establishing communications networks with the public and arrangements for parish councils, farmers, volunteers and other groups to provide support in the worst of conditions.

The need for a strategic salt stock is a reaction to recent severe weather conditions but is a temporary solution. By taking a significant amount of salt out of the supply, local highways authorities and others are excluded from acquiring it. If the intention is to get those who provide the service to plan effectively (which it must be) then retaining a strategic stock simply reduces supply. Local highways authorities should be trusted to firstly plan effectively which includes purchasing the salt which is available and secondly help other authorities out who have run short.

The Note also mentions that suppliers may take information from the Winter Road Salt Network Group and use it to make decisions about their deliveries but they will have other issues to consider. The Note itself clarifies the need to plan effectively for adverse winter weather by having adequate salt stocks, as the suppliers have been doing for many years and APSE has also done. There is always the chance that suppliers may be faced with the dilemma of having to supply customers who have not planned as effectively as they may have done at the expense of others who have planned well.

Planning for unusual weather conditions such as heavy snow, flooding or heat waves is something that local authorities need to be ready to do. Most are well capable of ensuring they have adequate arrangements in place for severe winter weather and planning for other events is requires a similar approach.

## **Use of Red Diesel**

### **1 Background**

In July 2012, (HMRC) launched a public consultation: *Use of Rebated Fuel for Gritting in Rural Areas* to establish whether a permanent change to legislation to permit tractors to use red diesel specifically when gritting roads to deal with ice and snow was desired by the communities affected and how such a change might affect commercial operators and official gritting authorities. The response was overwhelmingly positive and in December 2012 HMRC announced their intention to change to Schedule 1 of HODA to allow agricultural vehicles to use rebated fuel when gritting roads.

In July 2013, HMRC invited comments on the draft statutory instrument (SI) to add gritting to the permitted activities for tractors and light agricultural vehicles in Schedule 1 of HODA. Following further representation from organisations representing the farming industry in England and Wales, HMRC agreed that the change should be extended to include agricultural material handlers.

HMRC estimates that up to 10,000 farms and 500 gritting businesses will be affected to some extent. It is likely that, as gritting coverage may be extended to areas not normally gritted by commercial gritters, that there will be a small, but manageable increase in demand for salt and grit. Local businesses in rural areas are likely to benefit from access to villages being maintained.

The detail can be found [here](#).

There will be changes to Schedule 1 to the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979 (HODA) to allow certain agricultural vehicles to use rebated fuel (red diesel) when gritting roads. The change extends the eligible activities for agricultural tractors, light agricultural vehicles and agricultural material handlers to include gritting. It means that farmers can now use tractors and other equipment on the roads for gritting while powered by the coloured diesel, often used in farming equipment. Previously, only vehicles constructed or adapted solely for gritting roads were allowed to use red diesel for gritting purposes. Concerns the move would negatively affect gritting businesses were dismissed as the remote rural areas under question are not part of planned municipal gritting routes.

## **2 APSE comment**

All local authorities recognise the vital contribution that farmers make to clearing snow and supporting rural communities. The consultation responses back this up and this is a sensible development. Tractors and other agricultural vehicles are often the most suitable and readily available vehicles to use in rural areas and it is counter-productive to prevent them from helping out when farmers are willing and able to do so.

Local highways authorities need to make use of this resource during severe weather especially during times of reduced budgets.

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