

Sweeper Preps 200 Miles of Nebraska Roads for Restriping



In Douglas County, Neb., a sure sign of spring is when the county highway department deploys its Elgin Eagle mechanical sweeper to clean the winter's accumulation of sand and grime from 214 miles of roads, in preparation for the county's annual highway restriping program. Douglas County's highway department is responsible for cleaning streets within county boundaries, including all the roads in its unincorporated areas. Ridding the county highways of any remaining sand and debris is essential for the application of new centerlines, edgelines, crosswalks, stop bars, arrows and other road stripes.

"Before buying our current sweeper, we used skid-steer loaders with brush attachments for our spring sweeping," said Floyd Stenneche, Douglas County highway superintendent. "The Eagle is so much more productive and does a better job overall. It also keeps us on schedule for the restriping project. The crew never has to slow down or wait for the sweeper the way they did when we used skid steers."

Stenneche explained that the county highway department maps out a route covering all 214 miles of road that require restriping every year. The sweeper needs to maintain an interval of several miles ahead of the striping crew to keep the project on schedule. The department employs three trained sweeper operators, who drive the Eagle sweeper on alternate shifts. A three-man crew handles the restriping process, assisted by one or two flaggers in higher traffic areas.

A typical Omaha winter produces multiple incidents requiring the application of deicer and sand. Stenneche said the usual mixture applied to the roads is half salt and half

sand pre-wetted with calcium chloride, but when temperatures dip below 18°F—as they frequently do in mid-winter—the mixture includes a higher percentage of treated sand with calcium chloride to compensate for the salt's reduced effectiveness. A large amount of sand remains on the roads—especially along curbs and shoulders—along with other debris that accumulates throughout the winter.

"Sweeping improves traffic safety and benefits the environment by preventing sand from getting into the storm sewers," Stenneche said. He noted that intersections with turn lanes are particularly prone to accumulating large amounts of sand that need to be swept and removed.

"The sweeper does a thorough job of removing the sand in a safe and environmentally sensitive way," Stenneche said. The Elgin Eagle works in tandem with a "flusher" truck—a dump truck fitted with a 500-gal water tank and high-pressure hose nozzles to loosen and wash sand and other debris from concrete dividers and traffic islands that the sweeper cannot reach.

The sweeper also comes in handy for cleaning up a variety of spills that happen from time to time, and sweeping material such as gravel, wet concrete, trash and farm waste. Stenneche said the sweeper also proves its value in cleaning up the aftermath of windstorms, which can litter roads with brush and other materials. The department also uses the sweeper to keep its own equipment yard clean, saving dozens of man-hours per year.

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