

## **STRATEGIC SALT PROTOCOL - NOTE FOR LOCAL HIGHWAYS AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND**

### **Introduction**

Following the recommendations of David Quarmby's independent review into the response of England's transport system to severe winter<sup>1</sup>, 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.

**For this winter season, the Department has retained a strategic salt stockpile of around 305,000 tonnes with a further 120,000 tonnes being held by the Highways Agency. This note sets out the arrangements for allocation of strategic salt, if and when required, including the price of salt.**

### **The principles of strategic salt protocol**

Local highway authorities have a responsibility to ensure that they are adequately prepared for winter by maintaining sufficient salt stock. In the winter resilience independent report, it was recommended the following for local highway authorities to implement:

A new resilience benchmark of 12 days/48 runs, as recommended by David Quarmby, should be adopted for pre-season stockholding for English local highway authorities; they should then review their history of usage 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.

The strategic stockpile is therefore the **salt of last resort**, in the event of prolonged severe winter weather across the country. Therefore we continue to encourage local highway authorities to ensure they procure salt for their own networks in good time to ensure delivery, and do not rely on the strategic salt as the first point of call.

The Government does not make any profit when allocating strategic salt to authorities. The premium price of the strategic salt covers the cost of the salt itself which has been imported from various locations overseas together with the additional cost of it being stored and managed at various locations around England. The December 2010 audit that David Quarmby undertook at the request of the Secretary of State for Transport also highlights the importance of making the best possible use of salt. David Quarmby had a specific concern over the variation in spread rates between local highway authorities and the audit therefore addressed a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://transportwinterresilience.independent.gov.uk/>

recommendation to central Government, asking that we should urgently make available further research evidence from the National Winter Service Research Group to help underpin decisions by highway authorities on salt spread rates. This work was completed in December 2010 and is available on the UK Roads Liaison Group (UKRLG) website - [www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org](http://www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org). Authorities were also sent a copy of this document. The Department also 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 provide up-to-date guidance on choice of salt spread rates.

We also encourage local authorities that may be running low on salt stock whilst awaiting a delivery from their salt supplier to consider **mutual aid between authorities**. Over the past three winters mutual aid came in many different forms, including in the form of ad-hoc requests direct to the Department or through resilience teams. This year we encourage neighbouring local highway authorities to work together and provide mutual aid wherever possible. If this causes problems then the next step would be to contact the DCLG Resilience and Emergencies Division (RED). The Division who can assist in mutual aid brokerage can be contacted as follows:

[REDControl@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:REDControl@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

24/7 Duty Office Telephone – 0303 444 2718 and 0303 444 2799.

Desk Officers within DCLG's Resilience and Emergencies Division will consider the request and try to facilitate mutual aid. This will entail:

- finding a source of salt, agreeing how much could be provided in mutual aid;
- how the provider would be recompensed by the organisation requesting the aid (payment in money or salt amount returned after the emergency and once the outstanding salt delivery has arrived); and
- when and how the salt would be delivered.

This would have to be agreed by both parties, the organisation requesting the salt aid and the organisation supplying the aid. Experience has shown that the above activity is likely to take at least 3 hours per mutual aid request.

### **Regular salt stock monitoring**

Following the Quarmby reports published last year, the Department developed an electronic web-portal system to monitor local highway authority salt stocks throughout the winter season. The Department would appreciate co-operation throughout the winter from local authorities when salt stock information is requested.

For this winter (2011/12), we will request, via email, that Local Highway Authority Winter Service Managers input salt stock data into the electronic monitoring database. The objective of this is to:

- Monitor existing salt stocks across England, Scotland and Wales to ensure sufficient country wide resilience is in place; and
- Support timely data-collection in the event of any future severe winter weather event.

The frequency of the survey will be risk-based, i.e. dependent on overall resilience levels across the country and weather outlook. Access to the system is password protected and restricted to a limited number of users:

- Local Authority Winter Service Managers, who will be able to submit data on a weekly basis to the system;
- Other staff in Local Highway Authorities, can be provided with a read-only access to view their authority's own salt stock data;
- DCLG's Resilience and Emergencies Division, will be provided with a read-only access to view authorities across England (to aid with regional resilience planning);
- Department for Transport; and
- the Local Government Group will have read-only access to all local highway authorities in England.

The system can be accessed at <http://winter.atkinsglobal.com/winter/dft>.

It is not the purpose of the system to benchmark performance of individual highway authorities, or to advise highway authorities of how they should be managing their winter service. It should be noted that the information collected could be published as part of the Government's wider transparency agenda and would in any case be accessible via any relevant Freedom of Information/Environmental Information Regulation requests.

### **Winter Road Salt Network Group**

Following each stock survey, the results will be made available to a Winter Road Salt Network Group, who may meet if necessary. The Group will bring together officials from the Department for Transport (Chair), the Devolved Administrations (both Scotland and Wales), the Highways Agency, Transport for London, the Local Government Group (LGG), ADEPT (previously the County Surveyors Society), the Met Office, the Cabinet Office and DCLG Resilience and Emergencies Division. The purpose of the meetings will be for the Group to consider whether any authorities require access to salt from the strategic stockpile.

In addition 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.

### **Purchase of strategic salt**

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 we will be happy to accept a lower level of salt for purchase, we will not be able to exceed the quantity offered unless there are exceptional circumstances. 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 we 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 we would 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.

### **Cost per tonne for winter 2011/12**

The price per tonne of the strategic salt 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.

### **Future Contact**

The Department can be contacted at the following email address throughout the winter season for any salt related inquiries:

[Road.Salt@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Road.Salt@dft.gsi.gov.uk)

**Department for Transport  
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