

Snow storage facilities filling up at rapid rate

Total estimated haul will fill 960 Olympic-sized swimming pools

BY NATHAN LIEWICKI, EDMONTON JOURNAL

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Shane, left, Shauna Desjarlais and Jerry Sawan try to free Todd Golent's taxi at 103rd Avenue and 154th Street on Monday. Golent got stuck just before a plow hit the street.

Photograph by: Rick Macwilliam , The Journal

Crews have already hauled away more than one million cubic metres of snow from Edmonton streets -- about half of that total in January alone.

During an average winter, crews remove about 800,000 cubic metres of snow from streets.

Since October 2010, they have already exceeded that amount at the city's five snow storage facilities.

"It's going to be a bumper year," said director of roadway maintenance Bob Dunford, speaking Monday at the city's northwest snow dump at 185th Street and 107th Avenue. "We're probably going to exceed a capacity of 580,000 cubic metres at this site alone."

Dunford estimates the northwest facility's snow pile is already 25 metres high and rising daily. By the time winter is over, he said, crews will likely have removed more than 2.4 million cubic metres of snow, the most since 1994.

That's the equivalent of 960 Olympicsized swimming pools.

"I don't think I've ever seen this in Edmonton before," said Dunford. "It's a slushy mess."

Snow removed from city streets is transported to storage facilities, where meltwater ponds with liners are meant to protect against run-off into groundwater. After snow melts in the spring, sand left behind will be reused next winter.

Recycling sand helps cut down on the city's yearly snow removal budget, which is \$42.8 million for 2011.

Dunford declined to say how much of that budget has already been spent, but said the city has a financial stabilization reserve it can draw from to cover extra costs.

Stuart Copley, who lives near Raven Crest Golf Course, said it doesn't matter how much it costs the city to remove snow from his street, as long as the work gets done.

"I have got stuck four times since New Year's, and in my opinion that's four times too many," he said.

Dunford said the city is dealing with the recent heavy snowfall as best it can. He said the focus is still on residential streets.

"We need graders -- due to their weight -- to get down to the pavement. That's our focus," he said.

To make sure the city has the facilities it needs in the future a new snow storage site is being constructed near 50th Street and Highway 37. It's expected to be completed soon and replace a temporary site.

"The fifth permanent site in the northeast will have a capacity to store 500,000 to 600,000 cubic metres of snow," said Dunford.

nliewicki@edmontonjournal.com