

# Town encourages residents to be prepared for winter

By Eamonn Maher  
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Officials with the Town of Halton Hills are urging residents to make sure they're prepared for extreme winter weather conditions, even though the area has been basking in warmer-than-average fall temperatures.

According to Environment Canada and the Farmers Almanac, winter is expected to be back in full fury for 2017 after a relatively mild edition in 2016.

But as Halton Hills mayor Rick Bonnette pointed out, residents still had to deal with a surprise day-long ice storm this past April, with memories of a paralyzing and damaging ice event during the Christmas holidays of 2013 still fresh in the minds of many of the municipality's 60,000 residents.

No two winters are the same, and as we've experienced, the conditions are becoming more diverse, said Bonnette in discussing the Town's Winter Management Program.

2014 was the coldest winter on record, when we learned some new terms like polar vortex and frost quakes. We'd

never had a single complaint about pipes freezing in my 30-plus years on council until then. That was a first for me. Then last year, we didn't have any sign of (accumulating) snow until January 17.

Not helping matters is the variable conditions that can be found from one end of Halton Hills to the other, starting in Norval to the southeast along Hwy. 7 into northwest Acton, which is approximately 300 m above sea level.

In total, the Town maintains about 960 km of residential streets, 155 km of regional roads, 125 km of sidewalks, as well as dozens of school bus loading zones, cul de sacs, GO Transit bus stops and municipal parking lots on an annual budget of \$2.1 million.

It's based on a five-year average and last year we did okay with a little left over, said Dick Spear, the Town's superintendent of public works.

Going into November/December this year, we're in decent shape, but I hate to say that, because one year we had snow just before Christmas and it carried into the New Year. We spent a lot of money in just one week. Just putting salt on the roads is expensive and so is having people

work on statutory holidays.

More so than operational or financial considerations, Town officials are asking residents to be prepared for weather episodes that can remain in effect for 72 hours, or in the extreme case of the 2013 ice storm, a week without hydro.

Halton Hills Fire Department deputy chief Harry Olivieri noted that winter storms kill more Canadians than tornadoes, thunderstorms, flooding, lightning and Maritime hurricanes combined.

He stressed that every family should have an emergency exercise in place with three major considerations in mind: forming a plan to expect to be separated or evacuated, putting a survival kit in place and staying informed through the ordeal.

Climate change around the world has affected weather patterns and we're not any different here, said Olivieri.

We've seen some strange and wonderful things happen to us and we have to be prepared to react as a corporation. But citizens have to be aware of what they can do as well. The Town has an emergency response plan and another part of the puzzle is citizens having their own plan in place.



Town of Halton Hills superintendent of public works Dick Spear (left) and mayor Rick Bonnette inspect a new five-ton dump plow that will be pressed into service this winter.  
Photo by Eamonn Maher

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