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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR SAYS NJDOT PREPPED AND READY FOR 1999-2000 WINTER SEASON

Salt inventories have been filled, the liquid calcium is ready to go and the trucks have been fitted with plows as the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) completes its preparations for the upcoming 1999-2000 winter weather season.

"Some people predict an average winter this year, but in the wake of the last two mild winters who can say what's average any more. Early forecasts are often as reliable as a fortune inside a cookie. Everything should be taken with a grain of rock salt," said Gov. Christie Whitman. "This year, as always, we hope for the best but prepare for the worst winter has to offer."

"Keeping our roads open and safe helps make our state a better place to live, work and raise a family," the Governor said.

The Governor and Transportation Commissioner James Weinstein today inspected some of the NJDOT's snow fighting equipment at the department's Secaucus Maintenance Yard and pronounced the "troops" ready to fight the most severe weather should it hit.

"Meteorologists are constantly trying to predict weather patterns and gauge their impacts. Whatever we may be facing - a mild winter, a severe winter or something in between - the fact that we have the potential for snowfall in all parts of New Jersey underscores the need for us to be ready at a moment's notice. That's why we prepare ourselves every year for the worst Mother Nature can throw at us," Weinstein said.

The NJDOT begins the snow season with approximately 114,000 tons of rock salt on hand for use on New Jersey's nearly 16,000 lane miles of interstate and state highways, including ramps and shoulder lanes. NJDOT also has 613,000 gallons of liquid calcium on hand, which is mixed in with the salt to increase its effectiveness.

"From a materials standpoint, we're ready to fight the war on winter weather," Weinstein said. "As one prepares for a battle, a key factor is determining where your foe will be. And similar to the U.S. military, we employ technology to help us fight smarter."

The department utilizes 29 remote weather sensor stations along the state highway system that provide detailed information on weather and road conditions in specific regions of the state. The data provided by these stations includes air temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction, road and bridge surface temperatures, whether the pavement is wet or dry, whether the salt has been applied and the type and intensity of precipitation.

These weather stations augment weather forecasts supplied by NJDOT by a weather forecasting company.

"For a compact state, we can experience a wide variety of weather," Weinstein noted. "A storm that produces an inch or two of snow in central New Jersey can blanket the elevated portions of northwestern New Jersey with a foot of snow. The remote weather sensor stations allow us to tailor our salting and plowing activities based on the conditions in the local area."

The NJDOT has 622 pieces of equipment ready to plow snow and spread salt, including trucks, graders and loaders. In the event of a major storm, NJDOT can augment its forces with up to 1,100 contractor trucks. Contractors have been assigned specific highway segments and will be called out on an as-needed basis.

In addition to the NJDOT's force of 570 maintenance staff, the department has nearly 400 volunteer plow operators, drawn from the ranks of the state workforce, it can call out if needed. Volunteers must possess a commercial driver's license and undergo special training for the safe operation of snow plows and salt-spreading equipment.

The NJDOT also coordinates snow removal activities with the state's other transportation agencies and State Police from its Emergency Control Center, or Snow Room, located at department headquarters in Ewing Township. During a major snowstorm, representatives from NJ Transit, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, New Jersey Highway Authority (Garden State Parkway), South Jersey Transportation Authority (Atlantic City Expressway) and State Police staff the Snow Room to report problems immediately to NJDOT Snow Room staff, who can then quickly dispatch resources to help the hardest hit areas.

To assist the NJDOT in its salting and plowing operations, motorists are reminded that parking along state highways is prohibited during storms. Individual driveways are not plowed or cleared by NJDOT forces. To prevent driveways from becoming blocked from plowed snow, residents should clear a portion of the highway shoulder immediately adjacent to their driveway. This provides an area where snow from the plow truck can be deposited prior to reaching the driveway.

