

Fairfax County Snow Crews Undaunted by Winter Weather Despite
COVID-19 Vaccination Appointments

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FAIRFAX COUNTY, VA - It was the perfect, or perhaps imperfect, storm: a pandemic, a forecast predicting snow and ice during a time when thousands of people had appointments to be inoculated or tested for COVID-19.

That was the course of events facing the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services for several days in late January. At least six county buildings, including the Fairfax County Government Center, were vaccination centers and COVID-19 testing sites. At one location, health care workers were due to receive their second shots, at a rate of 90 people every 15 minutes. On another day, about 800 county residents 75 and older were signed up to be vaccinated. All the plans were in place when the storm hit. For days it blanketed the county with snow and sheets of ice. All parking lots, walkways and building entrances had to be cleared of snow and ice to make them safe for those who would brave the elements to make it to their potentially life saving appointments each day. The timing was too crucial to do anything except work; so, divisions within the Stormwater Management and Wastewater Management business areas were ready to roll.

“Our Wastewater Collection Division employees responded to the snow event and were directly responsible for two COVID-19 testing facilities,” said Matt Adams, Chief, Gravity Sewers Branch. “The sites were plowed, treated, and the parking lots and entrances were shoveled during the 12-hour rotational shifts,” Adams said. “These facilities are some of the highest priority to the community and were treated as such. We continually monitored each site to ensure they would be open and available to the public.”

At the same time, the Maintenance and Stormwater Management Division (MSMD) crews were on winter maintenance detail.

“We had a good portion of our organization activated for multiple shifts throughout the storm,” said Chad Crawford, Director, MSMD. “From an operations standpoint this includes MSMD, wastewater, solid waste, the Community Labor Force (CLF) and others. Thus, a lot of folks are involved with snow operations,” he said.

Fairfax County has 213 facilities; 159 building complexes; 54 roadway segments; and 17 transit/commuter sites. Snow removal can be a daunting task according to Bobby Kerns, Chief, Maintenance Operations Branch, MSMD.

“This is not as easy as it was many years ago,” Kerns said. “Due to the continuously growing inventory of facilities for which we are responsible and many new environmental regulations, snow removal has become too much for just MSMD staff and now requires staff from many divisions within DPWES,” he said. “There are many more pieces to the puzzle than there were 15 years ago when I first started managing snow. It was hard enough trying to keep up with the

growing inventory each year, but now we have the pandemic and that makes it a much more challenging task,” Kerns continued.

As Kerns put it, the DPWES snow fighters stood up to the challenge during an emergency. It was critical that the work be completed in time for the scheduled appointments...and it was. But that is not unusual. He said no matter what the crews are facing, they get the job done; however, this time “...they sure took it to the next level this week and took care of business like no other.”

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Images:

- Fairfax County Government Center, Fairfax, VA
- Snow Removal Team – Fairfax County, VA (*for both images with employees*)

Author:

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