

Road salt secured for Ohio counties, but prices skyrocket

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By Danielle Keeton-Olsen

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Some Ohio counties will pay a record amount for road salt this winter — more than triple the rate of a year ago.

The Ohio Department of Transportation will plow \$18 million into assuring that 21 counties previously without contracts with salt companies can be ready when the flakes fly.

Yesterday, the state Controlling Board authorized the purchase of 171,600 tons of salt for \$105.21 a ton from Midwest Salt, an Indiana company that contacted ODOT after the director issued an emergency declaration to buy the needed salt after earlier attempts to supply the 21 counties failed.

After the emergency declaration, Midwest Salt offered salt to the agency outside the normal bid process. But its price is more than three times the average per-ton rate ODOT paid last year.

“This is something we’ve never done before,” said ODOT spokesman Steve Faulkner. “We certainly don’t want to play this role of everyone for themselves, and we’ll work side by side with local communities.”

As part of stockpiling its winter supply of salt, ODOT will move the salt to its facilities and ask the counties to buy it at the contract price and take it to their local storage sites.

In ODOT’s previous three requests to vendors, 11 counties refused bids between \$103 and \$165 because they couldn’t afford them, while 10 counties did not receive any bids.

Franklin County was one of the counties able to secure bids before the emergency declaration; it is part of a group that will pay \$70.88

Summer salt purchases ranged from about \$40 to \$70, Faulkner said.

The contract applies only to this purchase, so if ODOT needs to buy more salt, it will have to re-enter the market, said Andrew Bremer, deputy director of policy and legislative affairs.

ODOT estimates how much salt it will need based on a five-year running average of the amount used by its contracted local government entities, so Bremer said they did consider last year's particularly harsh winter in preparing salt estimates for this winter.

"We do try to adequately plan ahead," he said.

ODOT has a storage capacity of 700,000 tons of salt; Ohio's average yearly salt use is 630,000 tons.

Last year, ODOT went through more than 1 million tons of salt, marking the worst winter the agency ever saw, Faulkner said.

If severe snow forces ODOT to refill its stock this winter, Faulkner said, the agency's \$2.8 billion budget should be able to cover it. He said the relatively lower cost of salt under the contract with Midwest Salt could better prepare communities to handle any extra salt purchases they might make.

"I think we're doing everything we can to minimize those prices by incurring those transportation prices on their behalf and making them available to communities," Faulkner said.

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