

Winter weather survey 2017



REPORT OF THE WINTER WEATHER SURVEY 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Winter Weather Survey 2017 was conducted by the Local Government Association's Research and Information team between 3rd October and 30th October 2017 to gather information about local authorities' plans and preparations in case of severe weather, to help the LGA's lobbying of central government and to highlight the scale of authorities' efforts.

The survey was sent to all 174 highways authorities in England and Wales. The response rate was 45 per cent as shown in the table below:

Type of authority	Number of respondents	Response rate
Type of authority	Number	Per cent
Counties	19	70%
London boroughs	15	45%
Metropolitan districts	12	33%
Unitaries	33	42%
Total	79	45%
Region		
East Midlands	9	100%
East of England	4	36%
London	15	45%
North East	4	33%
North West	7	30%
South East	11	58%
South West	8	50%
Wales	7	32%
West Midlands	6	43%
Yorkshire & Humber	8	53%
Total	79	45%

General notes

1. Given the response rate of slightly under a half, the results should be taken to be broadly indicative, rather than fully representative, of the views of authorities as a whole. It should be borne in mind that response varied by type of authority and by region. Because of the actual number of respondents, results are not broken down by type of authority or region.
2. Further to note 1, not all users answered, or were required to answer, every question, so the response to individual questions varies. In each table, the 'Total' row indicates the total number of respondents to the question, but note that this includes those who answered 'don't know'.
3. The winter gritting season is taken to start on 1st October.
4. Caution should be exercised when comparing results with previous surveys as the sample of responding authorities changes from year to year.

SUMMARY

The main findings were as follows:

SALT STOCKS

- 92 per cent of respondent authorities were planning either to have more salt in stock for winter 2017/18 than they did for winter 2016/17 (8 per cent) or the same amount of salt in stock (84 per cent), generally because they were at the limit of storage capacity, already at recommended levels, or had stocked up according to assessed need.
- It is estimated that authorities aimed to have 1.5 million tonnes of salt in stock at October 2017. They had an estimated 1.6 million tonnes in stock at October 2016, ordered a further 500,000 tonnes and used 800,000 tonnes during winter 2016/17.

RESOURCES

- Respondents owned or leased, on average, nine full-sized gritters, one mini-gritter, and four pieces of other gritting equipment, including snow blowers, tractors and quad bikes.
- 89 per cent of respondents were planning to take action to reduce the risk of flooding on roads. Sixty-seven per cent were planning to use gully-sucking lorries, 59 per cent were planning to use sandbags, 41 per cent were planning additional gully and drain inspections, and 23 per cent were planning to use pumps.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

- 72 per cent of respondents were planning to share resources with other councils or emergency services during winter 2017/18. Fifty-three per cent were planning to share salt, 28 per cent gritting machinery, 16 per cent staff, and 14 per cent gully-sucking lorries.
- 78 per cent of respondents were planning to use GPS to make the gritting process more efficient, 62 per cent were planning to equip street cleaners with salt, and 61 per cent were planning to use GPS on gully suckers.
- 84 per cent were planning to use community grit bins for the public, 61 per cent were planning to provide salt to other local groups, and 33 per cent were planning to use community flood wardens.

SURVEY FINDINGS

SALT STOCKS

More than four out of five respondent authorities (84 per cent) were aiming to have the same amount of salt in stock for the 2017/18 winter season as they had for the 2016/17 season (Table 1). The remainder were fairly evenly split between those aiming to have more salt (8 per cent) and those aiming to have less salt (9 per cent).

Table 1: for the 2017/18 winter season, is your council aiming to have in stock more salt, less salt or the same amount of salt as last year's winter season?

	Number	Per cent
More salt	6	8%
Less salt	7	9%
The same amount of salt	66	84%
Don't know	0	0%
Total	79	100%

Table 2 summarises the reasons for respondents having more, less or the same amount of stock as the previous year. The main reasons given for having the same amount of salt in stock were already being at or above recommended levels (45 per cent of respondents in this category), storage limits (41 per cent) or stock reflecting assessments of need (30 per cent).

Table 2: please indicate the reason(s) for your council having more stock, less stock or the same amount of stock as last year's winter season

	Number	Per cent
More salt (base=6)		
To increase resilience	4	67%
More storage capacity	1	17%
Reduce need to re-stock later	1	17%
Other	0	0%
Less salt (base=7)		
Re-assessed need since last season	4	57%
Other	3	43%
Same amount of salt (base=66)		
At limit of storage capacity	27	41%
Already at or above recommended levels	30	45%
Stock reflects assessment of need for forthcoming season	20	30%
Other	5	8%

Authorities were asked to quantify salt stocks, and 73 did so (Table 3). The figures have been grossed to produce a national estimate by applying the ratio of salt stocks to total road length observed in respondents to all authorities. This was done for each type of authority and the results summed to produce national estimates (the same method as used in previous surveys). Changes from one year to the next can be affected by changes in the sample of authorities responding to the survey.

It is estimated that local authorities in England and Wales had 1.6 million tonnes of salt in stock at 1st October 2016, ordered a further 0.5 million tonnes and used 0.8 million tonnes during the 2016/17 winter season, and aimed to have 1.5 million tonnes in stock at 1st October 2017.

Table 3: please state the amount of salt your council:		
Salt (tonnes)	Respondents only	Grossed estimate
Had in stock at the start of the last winter gritting season (1 st Oct 2016)	700,000	1,600,000
Ordered after the start of the last winter gritting season	200,000	500,000
Used across the whole of the last winter gritting season (2016/17)	400,000	800,000
Aims to have in stock at the start of this winter season (1 st Oct 2017)	600,000	1,500,000

Base: 73 authorities

RESOURCES

A total of 73 respondents provided information about gritting equipment (Table 4). Across all this group, councils or their contractors owned or leased a total of 1,326 full-sized gritters (median of nine per council), 101 mini-gritters (one), and 140 other pieces of gritting equipment (four). The latter included snow blowers, tractors, ploughs, quad bikes, and hand gritters.

Table 4: how many of the following types of gritting machinery does your council/maintenance contractor currently own or lease?		
	Total	Average (median)
Full-sized gritters	1,326	9
Mini-gritters	101	1
Other equipment/machinery	140	4

Base: 73 authorities

Around nine out of ten respondents (89 per cent) were planning to take action to reduce the risk of flooding on local roads (Table 5), most commonly using gully-sucking lorries (67 per cent), using sandbags or similar to contain floodwater (59 per cent), additional gully and drain inspections (41 per cent), or using pumps (23 per cent). Other measures added by respondents included long-term flood-risk management measures, highway drainage schemes and a risk-based approach to maintenance of watercourses.

Table 5: which of the following is your council planning in order to reduce the risk of flooding on local roads over the winter season?		
	Number	Per cent
Use of gully-sucking lorries	53	67%
Use of sandbags (or similar) to keep floodwater off roads	47	59%
Additional gully and drain inspections	32	41%
Use of pumps	18	23%
Measures to reduce landslips	7	9%
Other	14	18%
None	9	11%
Don't know	4	5%
Total	79	100%

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Just under three-quarters of respondents (72 per cent) were planning to share resources with other councils and emergency services over the 2017/18 winter weather season (Table 6), most often salt stocks (53 per cent) and gritting machinery (28 per cent).

Table 6: if necessary, which of the following resources is your council planning to share with other councils and emergency services during this year's winter weather season?

	Number	Per cent
Salt stocks	42	53%
Gritting machinery	22	28%
Staff	13	16%
Gully-sucking lorries	11	14%
Pumps	7	9%
None of the above	22	28%
Don't know	13	16%
Total	79	100%

All 79 respondents were planning to implement at least one of the listed measures for the 2017/18 winter season, to be delivered both within the council or by local groups (Table 7).

Looking at measures within the council, just over three-quarters (78 per cent) were planning to use GPS technology on gritters, 62 per cent were planning to equip street cleaners with salt, and 61 per cent were planning to use GPS on gully suckers. One in five (19 per cent) intended to use a variety of treatments on pavements other than salt, mostly liquid de-icers.

Turning to measures within the local community, more than four-fifths of respondents (84 per cent) were planning to use community 'grit bins', 61 per cent were planning to provide other local groups with salt or equipment, and 33 per cent were planning to use community flood wardens. Other measures written-in included all-round video recording, gully cleaning/fault monitoring system, approved list of local contractors, and road and snow wardens.

Table 7: which of the following measures, if any, does your council plan to implement for this year's winter weather season?

	Number	Per cent
Within the council		
Using GPS technology on gritters to manage gritting process	62	78%
Equipping street cleaners, or other staff, with salt to spread on pavements	49	62%
Using GPS technology on gully suckers to manage gully-cleaning process	48	61%
Using means other than salt to treat pavements (eg liquid de-icer)	15	19%
Other measures	5	6%
Within the local community		
Using community 'grit bins' for members of the public to help themselves to salt	66	84%
Providing salt or equipment to other organisations and other persons, such as parish councils, community groups and snow wardens	48	61%
Using community flood wardens	26	33%
Other community action	5	6%
Total	79	100%



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