



County Road Association
OF MICHIGAN

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Pothole Season Returns to Michigan
Commercial Vehicle Weights Reduced to Protect Roads

Lansing, Mich. – Today, the County Road Association of Michigan (CRA) announced the return of pothole season as the first counties implement seasonal weight restrictions – temporary reductions in commercial vehicle weights intended to protect Michigan roads.

“As temperatures warm up this week and frost starts to leave the ground, weight restrictions are a sure sign that pothole season has returned to Michigan,” County Road Association of Michigan director Denise Donohue said. “Due to the unusually deep frost this winter we’re expecting a bumper crop of potholes.”



According to the Michigan Transportation Asset Management Council, 83 percent of Michigan roads are in poor or fair condition. These already-deteriorated roads are at their most vulnerable condition as frost is leaving the ground.

“Even with weight restrictions, roads take a big hit each year,” Donohue said. “State and local road agencies have been putting band-aid fixes on our road system to keep it held together until adequate revenue becomes available. With the passage of Proposal 1 in May, they can stop the bleeding.”

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If approved by voters on May 5, Proposal 1 will provide for the enactment of laws that within 3 years will give state and local road agencies an additional \$1.2 billion in constitutionally-guaranteed revenue annually to fix roads and bridges.

“As you drive throughout the state in coming weeks expect to see crews out patching potholes,” Donohue said. “The reality is as one hole is filled another will open up during this freeze/thaw period of spring. Just like when roads are covered with snow and ice, motorists must take responsibility for their safety and slow down to avoid potholes.”

While potholes appear on all types of roads, seasonal weight restrictions only apply to roads not built for heavy truck traffic – a large portion of our county road network. The County Road Association offers the following information to help the public understand what we in Michigan now refer to as “pothole season.”

What are seasonal weight restrictions, also called frost laws?

Seasonal weight restrictions – frost laws – are designed to protect Michigan’s local roads from excess weight at times when they are most vulnerable to damage. State law allows MDOT, counties and municipalities to reduce truck weights and speeds on roads that are not built to accommodate heavy truck traffic. During the weight restriction period trucks traveling on “posted/restricted” roads must reduce speeds to 35 m.p.h. and carry lighter loads – a 25 percent reduction on concrete roads and 35 percent reduction on asphalt or gravel roads.

What causes potholes?

A pothole begins with moisture seeping into the soil, below the surface. When the moisture freezes it expands and pushes the pavement up. As the days become warmer and frost leaves the ground, the ground returns to normal, but the pavement remains elevated, creating a gap between the pavement and the ground below it. When vehicles drive over these gaps the pavement surface cracks and falls into the hollow space.

The County Road Association offers an infographic that shows the process.

Birth of a Pothole Square: http://www.micountyroads.org/pdf/BOPG_square.pdf

Birth of a Pothole Vertical: http://www.micountyroads.org/pdf/BOPG_vert.pdf

Birth of a Pothole Horizontal: http://www.micountyroads.org/pdf/BOPG_horiz.pdf

Avoiding Potholes – Adopt Safe Driving Practices

- 1.) Keep your tires properly inflated to manufacturer recommendation. Over and underinflated tires are more susceptible to damage.
- 2.) Have a clean windshield! Your field of vision is critical.
- 3.) Reduce your speed on roads that are prone to potholes.
- 4.) Use caution when driving over a puddle of water as it may be hiding a pothole.
- 5.) Stay focused and pay attention to traffic in front, behind and alongside you. You might be able to avoid potholes but do not want to cause an accident while doing so.
- 6.) If you can't avoid a pothole, slow down before you hit it. But don't brake directly over a pothole which can actually cause more damage and never slam on your brakes.
- 7.) When driving over a pothole, hold the steering wheel firmly to avoid losing control.
- 8.) As a general rule, don't cross the centerline or leave the paved road surface to avoid a pothole.

Information for Commercial Vehicles

The County Road Association provides a website – micountyroads.org/weight.php – to help commercial truck drivers comply with weight restrictions. The site is updated daily as restrictions are added and removed around the state.

By Michigan law road agencies enact and remove seasonal weight restrictions in March, April and May, or whenever conditions warrant. On average, the restriction period is approximately four to six weeks.

The County Road Association of Michigan represents the state's 83 county road agencies that collectively maintain 73 percent of Michigan's road system, representing more than 90,000 miles of roads and 5,700 bridges – the fourth largest local road system in the nation.

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