Landscape Damage Resulting from Gravel Road Maintenance

Private installations made by the property owner within the public right-of-way, such as sod, shrubs, sprinkler systems, etc. may be damaged in the process of snow removal or seasonal maintenance work. Damage that may occur is not intentional and in many cases is unavoidable.

Because it is the statutory responsibility of the Road Commission to maintain the roadways and right-of-way property, the agency is not held liable or responsible for any damage cause to private installations located within those roads and/or rights-of-way.

Special Assessment Districts for Private Gravel Road Maintenance

The Livingston County Road Commission (LCRC) maintains public roads while Hamburg Township maintains some private roads through special assessment districts.

Michigan’s Public Act 188 allows for the establishment of a Special Assessment District for the purpose of providing road maintenance for private roads. Maintenance can include such items as road grading, installation of gravel, snow removal, sanding for icy conditions, dust abatement through brine applications or other services as requested by the property owners. A special assessment district (S.A.D.) provides a means to collect the funds needed to provide road maintenance by assessing each property owner in the district through their property taxes.

For information on establishing a Special Assessment District (S.A.D.) for road maintenance of your private road please contact the Hamburg Township Utilities Coordinator at (810) 231-1000 Ext. 210.

Not sure if your gravel road is a public or private road?
Visit www.hamburg.mi.us and click on “Roads” for a list of private roads maintained by Hamburg Twp. as well as the LCRC Road Name Inventory

Hamburg Township
Utilities Coordinator
10405 Merrill Road
P.O. Box 157
Hamburg, MI 48139
(810) 231-1000 Ext. 210
e-mail: bcampbell@hamburg.mi.us

Livingston County Road Commission
Maintenance Department
3535 Grand Oaks Drive
Howell, MI 48843
(517) 546-4250

Hamburg Township
10405 Merrill Road
P.O Box 157
Hamburg, Michigan 48139
(810) 231-1000 Ext. 210
(810) 231-4295 FAX
**What is a Gravel Road?**

People call them "dirt," but unpaved roads really are gravel (plus sand and clay).

Gravel roads are often found in cold climates because they are less vulnerable to freeze/thaw damage than asphalt roads and also because it is not an issue if the surface of the gravel road is covered by snow and ice for extended periods.

**General Gravel Road Maintenance Issues**

Gravel roads require much more frequent maintenance than paved roads, especially after wet periods and when faced with increased traffic. Wheel motion shoves material to the outside (as well as in-between travelled lanes), leading to rutting, reduced water-runoff and eventual road destruction if left unchecked. Drainage problems are common because many of today's gravel roads evolved from trails or cattle paths and were not designed by engineers. As long as the process is interrupted early enough, simple re-grading is sufficient, with material being pushed back into shape.

Another problem with gravel roads is washboarding – the formation of corrugations across the surface at right angles to the direction of travel. They can become severe enough to cause vibration in vehicles so that bolts loosen or cracks form in components. Grading removes the corrugations and installation of good quality gravel can help prevent them from re-forming.

**Summer Maintenance**

Summer means applying extra gravel, mowing shoulders, ditching, cleaning culverts and grading. It can also mean dusty gravel roads. Dusty conditions occur when a disturbed road surface has dried out. Soil fines can actually shrink due to moisture loss which, in turn, loosens and weakens the soil surface. It is necessary to prevent the blowing and movement of dust from exposed soil surfaces, and reduce the presence of dust. Dust can cause off-site damage, be a health hazard to humans, wildlife and plant life, or become a traffic safety hazard. Brine application can help to control dusting by preserving the moisture level in the road surface materials.

A gravel road surface may lose one inch (1") of material per year from dusting resulting in a significant cost. This material which is mostly fine soils is essential in maintaining the integrity of a gravel road surface. Soil fines are the binders that hold the road surface material in a tight, hard mass and the fewer the fines, the looser the gravel, which adversely affects traction and can result in washboarding.

For less dust and a better road surface the Livingston County Road Commission (LCRC) and Hamburg Township applies a brine spray three to four times throughout the summer’s dust season on some gravel roads. Grading smooths gravel roads. However, it also breaks up the brined surface and creates dust, so it is performed about every four to five weeks. A safety concern may mean grading sooner. Many times road grading has to be postponed because of the weather. If the road is too dry to too wet grading has little affect other than to rearrange dust or mud.

**Winter Maintenance**

Gravel roads can be troublesome in winter. Frozen ground cannot be graded, and snow or ice removal and snow plowing are all more difficult. More gravel or sand can be applied for safety. Sand is spread on curves and corners for traction. Salt cannot be used on gravel roads because it soaks in and will not bond to the gravel surface to melt the ice.

The Livingston County Road Commission performs snow plowing for the publically maintained gravel roads on a priority basis. The private roads maintained by Hamburg Township through a special assessment district are plowed based upon the frequency requested by the property owners in the S.A.D. depending upon the depth of snow accumulation as well as safety factors.

Shoveling or plowing snow from driveways into or across roads is illegal (MCL 257.677a) because it can present a serious traffic hazard to motorists. Be sure to place snow to the right as you face the road, so plow will push it away from, rather than back into, your driveway entrance. It is also important to avoid vision obstructions. Care should be taken not to impede the flow of storm water from melting snow in the ditches and culverts.

One major problem each year is damage to mailboxes. Most mailbox damage occurs when heavy, wet snow is thrown against a weakened post or box. The LCRC cannot assume responsibility for such damage. If the mailbox or post is damaged by snow thrown by the snow removal, it is the homeowner’s responsibility to replace the box and post. If damage occurred as a result of direct contact with Road Commission snow removal equipment, a supervisor will meet with the homeowner to assess the damage for possible replacement. Mailboxes and post should be kept in good condition and located behind the curb or beyond the shoulder where it is less likely to be damaged.