Introducing Supervisor’s Signposts, the new T2 Center Supervisory Series

The T2 Center is very pleased to introduce the new series Supervisor’s Signposts.

Public Works Foreman/Supervisors are critical to the success of each department and we wanted to provide concise tips for ways you can improve your day-to-day leadership skills. The first in our series will focus on ways to be a better Role Model. We are hoping to introduce a new topic every few months. Each of the Supervisor’s Signposts will be posted on the T2 Center website at http://www.t2center.uconn.edu/safetybriefs.php#signposts.

Look for new topics in the near future.
Winter Weather Road Maintenance Q&A

Yes, winter is coming! Providing information to the public is an important function of any roadway agency. In regards to winter weather, there are some basic questions that might arise. Here are some common questions that the public may have regarding winter maintenance operations, along with some possible answers. We encourage you to refine this list to meet your agency needs. If your agency has a website or Facebook page, a Commonly Asked Questions section/post could be a great resource. One thing to remember when developing your answers is to avoid terms that may not be familiar to the public. Another option is to explain what the term means. For instance, instead of just saying primary routes you may say specific street names or route numbers or explain the primary routes consist of roads leading to hospitals, schools and so forth. Instead of just saying major connectors or arterials, provide a definition of what this means.

It has been days since it snowed, why is my road still covered?
Our agency prioritizes the different roadways that we are responsible for treating. Our first priority – before, during and after a winter storm – is always clearing our primary roads that provide access to essential services such as hospitals, schools, fire and police. Another high priority are the routes that are most heavily traveled, as our efforts there will affect the most people. We progress through these priorities, with most local roads being last, as they impact the fewest people. If snow continued to fall, or roadways begin to ice, we may have to continue treating our primary roads before we are able to move to the less traveled (secondary) roadways.

Why don’t you just put straight salt on the roads before a storm?
Salt that is put on dry roads doesn’t stick and tends to bounce off when applied or gets scrubbed off by car tires. Placing salt prior to the storm wastes money, as very little of the salt remains to help melt the snow and ice.

Pretreating with brine is the exception, as the salt is mixed with

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appropriate amounts of water that helps it stick to the road until the storm arrives.

**Can’t you just use more salt?**
It takes time for ice to melt and more salt doesn’t necessarily mean faster melting. The amount of time is based not only on the amount of salt, but also the temperature. Salt only works effectively to speed the melting process at temperatures of 15 degrees Fahrenheit or more. Even at these temperature, salt can only help so much, and excess salt will simply get washed away when the ice and snow melts. Excess salt can have negative effects on our environment, and thus we must be careful to use salt in appropriate applications and amounts.

**Why are the public works employees spraying liquid on the roads before it snows? Won’t the liquid freeze?**
While it may seem counter intuitive to spray liquid on the roadway during cold weather, the liquid we spray on the road is brine (a mixture of salt and water) that helps prevent and/or delay snow and ice from sticking to the pavement. By applying brine to the road prior to the storm, it starts to melt the snow as soon as it hits the pavement, which helps prevent the snow from sticking and helps alleviate ice on our roads.

When temperatures providing information to the public is an important function of any roadway agency.

**Why do I sometimes see snowplows driving during a storm with their plows raised and not plowing?**
There are several reasons for why you may see this, but the following are a few common ones. It is possible that the roadway may have been treated with salt or other de-icing products and the chemicals need time to work; plowing too soon may remove the mixture before it has an opportunity to work. Another possibility is that the plow driver is not assigned, or authorized, to plow the road and is driving to their scheduled route. The plow driver may also be driving back to the garage to replenish their salt or abrasives.

The following is a link to a very good winter information guide for local residents that was developed by the Town of Manchester, CT, you could use this as a template to design one for your town:
http://publicworks2.townofmanchester.org/index.cfm/winter-information-guide/

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Q: How can the on-street parking be improved to make the crosswalk safer? This is a two way street and it has a mid-block marked crosswalk.

A: Note that a car is parked in the crosswalk and there is designated on-street parking close to the crosswalk. Prohibit on-street parking at least 20 feet from the crosswalk upstream of traffic and 20 feet beyond the crosswalk. Include curb extensions to reduce the time required to cross the road. Also consider the road geometry and travel speeds of the approaching traffic and remove enough on-street parking so that the crosswalk user is visible to the approaching driver from a far enough distance to allow the driver of the vehicle to react to the crosswalk occupant.

The FHWA includes the following countermeasure for Pedestrian Safety in a crosswalk: “At least 20 feet of parking should be removed on the approach to a marked or unmarked crosswalk and about 20 feet of parking should be removed downstream from the crosswalk. Some agencies require that parking be cleared back 30 to 50 feet from intersections for pedestrian safety reasons. Well-designed curb extensions can reduce these distances and increase the number of on-street parking spaces.”

Based on MUTCD Figure 3B-21 page 386 and The Uniform Vehicle Code (sections 1-118 and 11-1003) Parking spaces are required to be a minimum of 20 feet from a marked or unmarked crosswalk at an intersection and a minimum of 30 feet on approach to a traffic signal. Connecticut Law section 14-251 states that “no vehicle shall be permitted to remain parked within twenty-five feet of an intersection or a marked crosswalk at such intersection, or within twenty-five feet of a stop sign caused to be erected by the traffic authority in accordance with provisions of section 14-301.”

A crosswalk is defined in the Uniform Vehicle Code section 1-118-Crosswalk (a) as That part of a roadway at an intersection included within the connections of the lateral lines of the sidewalks on opposite sides of the highway measured from the curbs or, in the absence of curbs, from the edges of the traversable roadway; and in the absence of a sidewalk on one side of the roadway, that part of a roadway included within the extension of the lateral lines of the existing sidewalk at right angles to the centerline. (b) Any portion of a roadway at an intersection or elsewhere distinctly indicated for pedestrian crossing by lines or other markings on the surface.

Parking is prohibited in the Uniform Vehicle Code section 11-1003 as (a) Except when necessary to avoid conflict with other traffic, or in compliance with law or the directions of a police officer or official traffic-control device, no person shall:

1. Stop, stand, or park a vehicle:
   A. On the roadway side of any vehicle stopped or parked at the edge or curb of a street;
   B. On a sidewalk;
   C. Within an intersection;
   D. On a crosswalk;
   E. Between a safety zone and the adjacent curb or within 30 feet of points on the curb immediately opposite the ends of a safety zone, unless a different length is indicated by signs or markings;
   F. Alongside or opposite any street excavation or obstruction when stopping, standing, or parking would obstruct traffic;
   G. Upon any bridge or other elevated structure upon a highway or within a highway tunnel;
   H. On any railroad tracks;
   I. On any controlled-access highway;
   J. In the area between roadways of a divided highway, including crossovers;
   K. On highways and elsewhere throughout the state in any parking space designated by the International

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Access Symbol without displaying an authorized disabled parking registration plate, removable windshield placard, or temporary removable windshield placard as defined in S3-901.

L. At any place where official traffic-control devices prohibit stopping.

2. Stand or park a vehicle, whether occupied or not, except momentarily to pick up or discharge a passenger or passengers:
   A. In front of a public or private driveway;
   B. Within 15 feet of a fire hydrant;
   C. Within 20 feet of a crosswalk at an intersection;
   D. Within 30 feet of any flashing signal, stop sign, yield sign or traffic-control signal located at the side of a roadway;
   E. Within 20 feet of the driveway entrance to any fire station and on the side of a street opposite the entrance to any fire station within 75 feet of the entrance (when properly signposted);
   F. At any place where official traffic control devices prohibit standing.

3. Park a vehicle, whether occupied or not, except temporarily for the purpose of and while actually engaged in loading or unloading property or passengers:
   A. Within 50 feet of the nearest rail of a railroad crossing;

“Through hard work and great opportunities, I have been able to advance my position from Laborer 1 to Assistant Foreman in twelve years. I work in the town where I was born and would someday love to be the Public Works Director in my town.”
- Kevin Gambacorta, Assistant Foreman – Town of Ellington

Great job Town of Ellington!

Tips From Tony

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   E. Within 20 feet of the driveway entrance to any fire station and on the side of a street opposite the entrance to any fire station within 75 feet of the entrance (when properly signposted);
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Useful Links:
http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/
Sally Katz – Town of Wethersfield – Contributing to the Professional Development of Connecticut Public Works Professionals

Sally Katz is Director of Physical Services for the Town of Wethersfield and has an extensive background in management and operations. Along with her day to day responsibilities, Ms. Katz has been helping the T2 Center as an instructor for our public works professional development programs. Ms. Katz is an instructor for the Transportation Leadership Program’s Module Two: Promoting Professionalism & Creating a Safety Culture in Your Agency and for the Public Works Academy’s Professionalism & Communication Skills.

What are your duties and responsibilities as Director of Physical Services for the Town of Wethersfield?
I direct and supervise highway operations, the garage, trees, parks, grounds, curbside trash & recycling, transfer station, building maintenance, building renovations and special projects. I also participate on a number of Town committees.

Can you give us a little glimpse into your background and what led you to a career in public works?
I grew up in New Haven, CT. I attended the University of Connecticut for both my undergrad and graduate degrees. I graduated with a BA in archaeology & art history and then went on to get my Master’s in Public Administration. As for my career, I can tell you that I didn’t take a straight path to Public Works. I went to work at NYU in student services and housing. NYU began to expand into a residential university and I became the head of the off-campus housing office then I went to work for the Department of Facilities. There I started working on the team that had oversight for the design and construction of new residence halls, athletic facilities and dining spaces. I left NYU to become the Director of Facilities at Trinity College, in Hartford, CT. At Trinity I was able to expand on my knowledge base by learning about historic restorations, academic space planning and the maintenance of the campus landscape. While I loved working in an academic environment I wanted to try something new. Wethersfield offered me the opportunity to do the building project work that I loved in addition to learning about road design & maintenance, Parks maintenance and project work that directly involve residents. What I didn’t know was the intensity and stress of winter operations and storm emergency management.

Can you expand a little bit more on what you mean regarding winter operations and storm emergency management?
As a private resident I never realized how much went into planning and preparing for a winter storm. When it snows you see the plows and think nothing more. Storm management is intense and there is so much that

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went into it. You can’t just jump into a truck and go plow! When you see the plows go by your home, it’s not just a random route. All routes are planned, mapped out for streets, parking lots, cul-de-sacs, etc. There are specific techniques the drivers must learn and use to plow a street and the drivers must know when to use certain materials at the correct times. You must make sure that those materials are stocked and make sure all of the equipment is ready to go. You must learn the right times to deploy the plows. The Public Works guys are actually the very first responders when an emergency happens. If they don’t get the centerline (on a road) plowed and cleared then the police officers and firefighters wouldn’t be able to get to you, although they don’t get the same respect as the “first responders”. I really hold the Public Works community in high regards. Not until you become a part of it, you cannot truly understand and respect it. And that’s not just in the case of winter operations. Come spring time, who do you think gets the 27 ballfields ready for your town’s opening day? There is just so much that goes into this job that very few outside of Public Works really seems to take into consideration. There seems to be a negative idea of the Public Works profession. Through our actions as Public Works professionals we can change that.

What are your favorite parts of your job? What gets you excited to come to work every day?
I love the variety of my job. There are days when I delve into developing a project and working with colleagues to strategize how to efficiently attain our goal. During the same day I can be out in the field evaluating road conditions, reviewing park projects, and seeing how residents are using the services and facilities the town has to offer. There are also some days where if needed I answer the phone, go get parts for a snow plow or help set up for an event.

What is your approach to developing the skills and knowledge of your team?
I’m a big supporter of professional development and continuing education. I support my staff to learn new skills both for the job they currently have and possibly for the one they want in the future. Education is the one thing in life that continuously builds upon itself and no one can ever take what you have learned away from you. The challenge is to be open to learning new things and then figuring out how to use them in your own real world experience. It’s the joy of exploration, creativity and taking chances to try new things or a new way of doing something.

As a Director of an entire department for a municipality, you have a lot of responsibilities, what made you want to become one of the T2 Center’s team of instructors?
I love that there is a place where Public Works professionals can come and learn about topics which directly relate to their jobs; taught by people who are living and working in their world. It’s a place where it’s coming together of “book” knowledge, real world experience and a place where you can throw out ideas for where you want to see Public Works develop in the future.

The two workshops you teach for the T2 Center both include professionalism and communication skills in the workplace, why these topics? I think it’s really important that as supervisors we instill in our staffs that Public Works is a highly skilled and technical profession. It’s work that will always challenge you and give you opportunities to learn new skills and techniques. In many cases our staffs have developed skills by doing the work and not just by reading about how to do it in a classroom. It’s my challenge to help them take what they have learned and use it to promote themselves in the workplace. So I try to help give them ideas on putting together a resume, how to effectively confront a difficult situation and how to communicate when they are in difficult situations. My goal is that by learning how to professionally present themselves in the workplace that our residents will regard them the same way and with the same respect they do our police officers and firefighters.

Now that you have taught a few workshops for us, do you have any stories or antidotes you would like to share with the readers?
I like the contrast between the first half hour and the last half hour of the day. You can tell early in the day that there are many of the participants thinking “why am I here, this is boring, I can’t believe I’m going to be here for 8 hours.” By the end of the session they are talking, participating, strategizing and seeing the value in thinking of themselves as professionals.

What’s been your favorite part of working with the T2 Center and the participants in both the Public Works Academy and the Transportation Leadership Program?
No doubt it’s the people. Everyone that I have met and come in contact with has been a wealth of knowledge.

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Connecticut Public Works Departments showing support for October’s National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

The Towns of Fairfield and Newtown show their support for Breast Cancer Awareness month.

and experiences all of which they are willing to SHARE! The T2 Center and Public Works community has been incredibly helpful answering my questions, giving me materials to help me learn about issues, provided guidance and sometimes have just “been there” to help when I needed a sounding board. The T2 Center offers education and technical expertise that the everyday town resident has no clue actually exist and does not realize how much this education to our Public Works community benefits all town residents. This community is there to help and that is its greatest achievement.