

# Area's snow removal bills are piling up

◇ Towns and villages in Monroe County will team up to get more road salt at a better price.

By Amy Cavalier  
Messenger Post Staff

Area highway superintendents had an emergency meeting in Greece Tuesday to discuss road salt availability and pricing.

Jim Fletcher, Penfield's superintendent of highways, said the towns and villages have decided to bargain collectively for 10,000 tons of salt.

"I don't think it'll be enough to get us all through the entire winter but it will last for the time being," Fletcher said. "We've all been chasing down salt separately, but the hope is that when one call gets placed for all of us, it will garner more weight, and we'll be able to get a better price."

Although exact numbers were not available at press time, Penfield has used twice the amount of road salt so far this year than it had during the entire winter of 2001-02, Fletcher said. The town went through about 3,500 tons of road salt last year.

Supervisor Channing Philbrick said the town has already ordered 8,200 tons of salt from the closest major salt supplier.

That is the most Penfield can order under its contract with the salt supplier. From there, Philbrick said, "We are at the mercy of the market."

With 414 miles of county, state and town roads to plow, and close to 100 inches of snow having already fallen this season, the Penfield Department of Public Works has had its hands full this winter.

Fletcher said his crews have been out in force every day since well before Christmas.

"Our first run was Nov. 2 this year, whereas last year we didn't even go out till after Christmas," he said.

Fletcher said Penfield's snow removal budget has been stretched with crews plowing nights, weekends and on both holidays since Christmas. He said it's likely that the town will go over its snow removal budget for the year.

"During an average winter,"

## Mailbox policy

Penfield Highway Superintendent Jim Fletcher said the Public Works Department has received about 100 phone calls about replacing damaged mailboxes.

Fletcher said the department is not legally responsible for replacing them, but he said it is town policy to replace mailboxes that actually get hit by the plow with a standard box and post.

More often than not, though, Fletcher said, the weight of the snow coming off the plow is what damages the mailbox. In that case, the department will not replace them. He said crews will not be able to get out to replace mailboxes until after snow removal is caught up.

Fletcher said, "there might be 3,500 hours of overtime." He said there have been more overtime hours this winter than an entire average winter.

Philbrick said many don't realize that 60 percent of the town's snow and ice control is done on state and county roads. That means the town can bill the state and county for the cost of keeping those roads clear.

"When it comes to the towns roads, though," Philbrick said, "we are on a fixed budget."

He said the town has about five to seven percent of money in its reserve fund in the event that something unplanned comes up, such as the severe weather of this winter.

"I'm sure we can get through the 2002-03 winter season reasonably well, just as long as we don't see a bad 2003-04 winter right from the start," Philbrick said. "Historically, Mother Nature doesn't hit hard on both ends."

Fletcher, meanwhile, said his crews are used to the long hours, but "we are all wishing for spring."

"Enough is enough," he said. "Considering the man hours and materials we've already used this winter, it's staggering to think we could double that total by the time winter's through."