

Maintenance Advisory

MA 2009-11

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Snow Plowing Near Railroad Crossings

The Michigan Department of Transportation's Rail Safety Section would like to offer several tips regarding snow removal and de-icing at and around railroad crossings.

Please always remember:

- Snow piled high near railroad crossings can prevent gate arms from descending into their downward position and can block motorist's view of railroad warning devices and approaching trains. Also, the force of snow hitting railroad warning lights can knock them out of focus thus it is important to slow down to reduce the force at which snow is propelled off of the plow.
- Excessive applications of de-icing chemicals and sand can result in the malfunctioning of railroad automatic warning devices. When salt and chemicals are applied on or near railroad crossings, railroad ballast can become contaminated and produce conditions where electrical signals carried through the rails short out, resulting in false activations of the warning devices. When this occurs, railroads may have to replace ballast or may place a slow-order on their trains, resulting in delays to motorists.
- Plowing too close to railroad crossing surfaces can dislodge ties and rails, which can cause train derailments and damage to snowplows. Whenever possible, snowplow blades should be raised slightly when plowing over railroad crossings.