



# Illinois Department of Transportation

2300 South Dirksen Parkway / Springfield, Illinois / 62764

January 9, 2009

## **CIRCULAR LETTER 2009-01**

### **SNOW REMOVAL NEAR RAILROAD CROSSINGS**

COUNTY ENGINEERS/SUPERINTENDENTS OF HIGHWAYS  
MUNICIPAL ENGINEERS/DIRECTORS OF PUBLIC WORKS

We are contacting local agencies to relay safety concerns regarding snow removal near railroad crossings. It has been brought to our attention that recent snow removal operations in a nearby state caused a railroad crossing gate malfunction when snow plows piled snow so high that it prevented the gate arm from descending down into the active warning position. Additionally, snow piled up over three feet in height can obstruct the view of oncoming trains at railroad crossings. We ask that where possible, snow plow operators avoid piling snow on or near railroad crossings, under gate arm mechanisms, and on access roads parallel and adjacent to railroad tracks.

Another related concern involves the malfunction of railroad signal systems due to excessive applications of salts and chemicals being used for roadway de-icing. When salts and chemicals are applied directly on or very near the railroad crossing area, timber and ballast resistant properties can be reduced and over time, produce conditions where electrical signals being carried through the rails can short out, resulting in false activations of the railroad signal system. Once this takes place, the railroad crossing surface, ties and ballast must be completely removed and replaced with clean materials.

Additionally, it should be noted that snow removal operations over railroad crossings can cause physical damage to railroad crossing surfaces. Plowing over the top of, and too close to the roadway surface over railroad crossings can cause damage such as the dislodging of planks or in some cases, dislodging of the rail from the ties, which could cause a derailment. Whenever possible, snow plow blades should be raised slightly when plowing over a railroad crossing.

Your efforts to address these concerns during winter roadway snow and ice removal activities will help improve safety for motorists in Illinois.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darrell Lewis".

Darrell W. Lewis, P.E.  
Acting Engineer of Local Roads and Streets