

Department heads should invite elected officials to functions where they associate with managers and crews as people. Functions with family members are especially effective. Even if officials cannot attend, or stay for a very short period of time, they will appreciate the gesture.

Define Department Responsibilities. Clear department policies effectively define responsibilities.

When policies are established and followed, the board and public know what to expect from the highway department. If there is ever a question as to why something was done in a particular way, everyone, from a selectmen to a part-time seasonal employee, can point at a policy as a standard of operation.

Policy development can itself improve relations with elected officials and the public. As a decision making tool, policy creation allows the focus to be on an issue rather than on a particular incident or person.

Established job descriptions provide the same benefits as having written policies. The board and employee know what is expected of them without any gray areas.

Other Practical Advice

If a Road Manager is having difficulties with their board, these steps can change the situation. Clear two-way communication fixes many problems. Road managers should also talk to road managers in surrounding communities. They can often offer a few pointers to make life easier. The following are examples.

Before bringing a proposal before a Board or Council, the road manager should consider the likelihood of it passing. If slim, they should use the time to lay the groundwork. For example, they can take board members into the field to see problems. If this isn't possible, they can take slides or a video to show the board. Pictures can help to make a case. They can invite "experts" to speak in favor of the proposal. A concerned citizen or salesperson can be a strong ally.

Managers should be aware of the public perception of the highway department. Richard Lee, the Road Agent in New London and Selectman in Milan, suggests that equipment is kept clean and

Road Business, Fall 1999, Vol. 14, No.3

employees look busy. He said, "citizens like it when you care for your equipment and it doesn't look good to allow employees to lean on shovels." Also to maintain a good relationship with New London Selectmen, he keeps them informed of happenings in the highway department. He keeps paperwork up to date so he can answer questions as they arise.

Chum Cleverly, a Master Road Scholar and the Director of Public Works in Bow, said, "Don't take anything a Selectmen says personally. Try to look at things from their point of view whether you agree or not. Try to have all your ducks in a row, and keep them informed."

Chum writes a lot of memos to his Board. Then, when a citizen questions a board member, the board member is informed. This makes them look good and they appreciate it. He also suggests being specific when explaining needs of the highway department. Explain the costs of repairs and how doing something will benefit the town. Also, he suggests that road managers write and maintain good notes.

Source:

Improving Your Public Relations, Special Bulletin, South Dakota, 1996

Muntz, Hans, *How to run a road department*, Better Roads, October 1994

Wiggins, John, *The Best Public Works Department*, R2T2, Fall 1997

New DigSafe Rules

Effective January 1, 2000

Prior to January 1, 2000 premarking was optional it is now mandatory. It must be done before contacting DigSafe for a permit. Premark the area where the excavation will occur. Identify the perimeter of the proposed site of excavation, in an appropriate manner, with white paint or other suitable white markings on nonpaved surfaces. Premarking must not interfere with traffic or pedestrian control, or be misleading to the public. It is not required on any continuous excavation over 100 feet in length. If over 100 feet, the excavator must indicate the perimeter of the excavation in a manner acceptable to the excavator and utility operator.

Other changes involve increasing fines.