

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, Jan. 2, 2009
12:30 p.m. update

Public Road Condition Inquiries: Call 5-1-1/ out of state callers call 1-800-695-ROAD (7623).

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Mountain pass highways open; WSDOT gearing up for next storm

OLYMPIA - As WSDOT crews still fight blowing snow in the Palouse, all primary major east-west travel routes through the mountains are now open.

Earlier today, WSDOT's Avalanche Control Team determined the snow pack is stable enough to reopen US 12 over White Pass.

While the calendar may have turned from 2008 to 2009, winter's grasp on Washington stayed the same, with heavy snow Thursday in the Cascades and extreme winter conditions over most of Eastern Washington. WSDOT closed all primary routes through the Cascade Mountains Thursday due to extreme avalanche danger and natural snow slides falling on highways.

A break in the weather Thursday allowed WSDOT Avalanche Control crews to get the unstable snow off the mountain above I-90 and clear it from the road. WSDOT was able to open Snoqualmie Pass by 8 p.m. Thursday. With a lighter-than-expected snowfall at Stevens Pass, crews had this route open by 8 a.m. today.

As the storm tracked south overnight, pockets of snow and ice developed in Western Washington this morning, with drivers greeted by icy highways on I-5 through Lewis and Cowlitz counties and along coastal areas. In higher elevations, such as US 12 over White Pass, Avalanche Control crews waited for the weather to clear before assessing avalanche danger. Maintenance then cleared natural snow slides from the road today.

The next big mountain snowfall is expected Sunday afternoon and WSDOT's Avalanche Control Team will be monitoring conditions at all mountain pass highways over the weekend. In most of the state, temperatures should return to a more normal winter pattern.

Drivers should still prepare themselves and their car for winter driving conditions. Remember, if there is ice on your windows, there could be ice on the roads. If you must drive in ice and snow, take it slow.

Today, traction tires are advised for all vehicles on Snoqualmie Pass, and required for all vehicles on White Pass and Stevens Pass.

Highway 20 at Newhalem (milepost 121) remains closed because of avalanche danger. An avalanche technician will assess the conditions and WSDOT may open the roadway later today.

Know Before you go:

*Get information from our Web site at www.wsdot.wa.gov before you leave your home or office.

*511 - This driver information phone line provides current traffic, incident and closure information. TTY users can call 1-800-833-6388. Out-of-state callers can access the information at call 1-800-695-ROAD (7623).

*Mountain pass conditions are available at www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/passes/.

*At www.wsdot.wa.gov/winter drivers can find WSDOT's winter driving-related information, including preparing a vehicle for winter driving, safe driving tips and mountain pass travel advisories. The WSDOT winter site also offers information about chains, winter tires and how WSDOT maintenance crews work in winter weather.

*On WSDOT's Web site, www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/weather drivers can look at roadway temperatures and see camera images from across the state.

*At www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/trafficalerts a map shows highway incidents and closures.

*Sign up for news. WSDOT offers subscribers more than 25 specialized e-mail alerts, including news and information for freight haulers, construction related traffic revisions, project updates from all around the state, and timely updates on pass conditions. Visit www.wsdot.wa.gov and click the link for "E-mail updates."

*Twitter users can add WSDOT to their personal accounts at: <http://twitter.com/wsdot/>. Go to www.wsdot.wa.gov/inform/twitter for more details.

On the Road:

*Overhead and roadside electronic signs *Highway advisory radio - WSDOT advises drivers to program 530AM and 1610AM on your radio.

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