

Road salt goes south to NYC; Victor company's salt bin nearly empty

As if traffic advisories, canceled flights, snow, ice and frigid temperatures weren't enough, the latest snag in the long saga of this winter is access to road salt. Due to the extreme weather, road salt is not piled at the mines waiting to be shipped like usual — it's moving out immediately by trucks and rail cars to where it's needed most. **And due to a directive from the governor, communities' downstate is getting first dibs. That has left local commercial salting operations out in the cold and while municipalities are told they can get salt, the wait for that salt can be indefinite.**

On Monday, Jim Welch, president of John Welch Enterprise, Inc. in Victor, sent a letter of apology to his customers warning that due to "severe widespread temperatures, our ability to get salt have been stopped..."

On Feb. 5, in declaring a statewide state of weather emergency, **Gov. Andrew Cuomo directed surplus salt supplies from stockpiles used on state roads to go to New York City and Long Island localities in need.** Initially, 3,500 tons of road salt — about 130 truckloads — was sent to those communities, Cuomo said in a release.

"The state is also working with suppliers to increase salt deliveries to local governments," Cuomo stated.

"Companies like ours cannot get salt and we are told the governor has mandated where salt needs to go," Welch said Thursday. He was cut off about 10 days ago, he said, but waited to alert customers until after he exhausted all other possible sources of salt from within and outside of New York State. Like all the municipalities in Ontario County and thousands of other customers, Welch buys salt that comes from the largest operating salt mine in the United States, American Rock Salt in Livingston County. According to its website, the mine has the capacity for producing up to 18,000 tons a day.

Welch's salt bin is nearly empty. The bin holds 150 tons and between 3-to-4 tons remain. Welch said he ordered about 700 tons of salt and received about half that, the most of which has already been applied. The little that remains will be used sparingly, based on phone requests in areas of extreme need, said Welch, whose landscape/construction company at 1723 Route 444 in Victor serves hundreds of customers.

Welch's customers are throughout the Canandaigua and Rochester areas and include shopping malls, fast food restaurants, apartment complexes, hotels, wineries, churches, factories, retailers and homeowners' associations.

Bob Bennett, general manager of Holiday Inn Express Hotel and Suites in Victor, one of Welch's customers, said this coming weekend is one of his busiest with Valentine's Day, President's Day and a Canadian Holiday. He is concerned about the weather and if it takes a turn for the worst he will be posting signs urging people to be extra cautious, he said. "Right now it is dry," Bennett said Thursday. "But if we get ice we will put notices on all the entrances to be careful."

As for salting roads, the governor said there is enough salt to cover state roads. In Ontario County, most municipalities report they have enough salt — for now.

"But one ice storm could really put a damper our supply, As always, NYC comes first.