

## **ONTARIO CENTRE FOR MUNICIPAL BEST PRACTICES**

393 University Ave., Suite 1701, Toronto, Ontario M5G 1E6

### **BEST PRACTICE SUMMARY REPORT**

**March 2003**

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#### **Roads – Winter Control – Flexible Working Hours (BP 4-03)**

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**Practice identification:** Roads - Winter Control – Flexible Working Hours

**Case- study municipality:** United Counties of Prescott and Russell

**Key Words:** Management and Organization

#### **Benefits Which Resulted from the Adoption of this Practice**

- **Reduced overtime and expenses for stand-by pay**
- **Able to meet requirements of Commercial Vehicle Operator Regulations and Employment Standards Act re: hours of work**
- **Flexibility for employees re: winter working hours**
- **Eliminates the labour cost differences in a decision to respond to road conditions by calling the road crew in early or waiting until regular hours commence**

#### **Description of the Practice:**

The Public Works Department outside employees in the United Counties of Prescott and Russell have an innovative winter labour practice that exchanges very flexible on-duty winter hours at regular rates for paid hours on standby (at home) when there is no work required.

The staff are paid based upon a 45 hour work week; 8 hrs. per weekday and 5 hrs on the weekend. They are on-call beginning at 3 a.m. until 10 p.m., and can be directed to attend several times for up to 8 hrs. total at regular wages (second and subsequent call-ins earn ½ hr. travel time). Whatever hours under the 8 were not worked, is paid as standby. Any hours worked over 8 in that day is paid at overtime rates (9<sup>th</sup> hr. at reg., balance at 1.5 X rate). On the weekend, employees get 5 hours standby if not needed. If called in to work, they work the first 5 hours at regular wages and then earn overtime.

Using this system, approx 13% of winter wages are “standby” earnings and the County pays a total overtime bill of some \$20,000. Without this agreement, typical overtime costs in similar municipalities could be in the \$ 50,000-60,000 range.

The practice is somewhat historic but was recently clarified following the transfer to the County of former provincial highways.

The County of Prescott and Russell (pop. 73,631) is an Upper Tier Municipality located east of the City of Ottawa on the Ottawa River. The western portion is part of the Ottawa commutershed, and the balance is flat to rolling rural topography. Much of the County road system is relatively low-volume arterial roads in a rural environment.

### **Evaluation of the Practice**

#### Efficiency

Responses to winter storm events are not typically well suited to rigid start/stop shift times, with overtime rates paid before and after the fixed shift. The Prescott and Russell arrangement eliminates the labour cost differences in a decision to call winter maintenance crews in early or to wait until regular hours commence. Under the Province’s new Minimum Maintenance Standards response requirements, this flexibility of shift scheduling will significantly help the County to achieve winter storm response standards economically within the specified times.

#### Effectiveness

The use of flexible hours helps the County to accommodate Commercial Vehicle Operator Regulations affecting hours at work and driving time. A straight shift of on-duty time can be detrimental, since managers may be tempted to “make work” for the crews, rather than providing the needed off-hours. Because of the extensive coverage provided by County employees under this arrangement, complex arrangements for second shift coverage, as well as the training issues around spare drivers, are significantly reduced.

#### Statutory requirement

Recently the Ministry of Labour has confirmed that winter control operations are exempt from the Employment Standards Act.

### **Replication**

The practice is unpublished in a municipal or trade journal

Any department with a single shift, significant overtime usage and 24 hour winter response requirements could benefit from this practice.

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There are no trademark or copyright issues involved.

There are no funding issues involved.

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