



THE IMPACT OF SEASONAL ROAD WEIGHT LIMITS ON HOME CONSTRUCTION



Restrictions Benefit Homeowners, But Also Cause Delays

Spring brings a lot of changes: new growth, less snow, more sunshine. And, in cold northern locations like Wisconsin, spring also brings policy changes for our road system. Beginning Monday, March 8, 2021, many municipalities in the Milwaukee metropolitan area will begin enforcing weight limits on local roads. Under these limits, large trucks and trailers (like those that carry building supplies) will be unable to navigate restricted roads until the restrictions are lifted in several weeks. This annual practice of enforcing temporary weight limits helps to protect the roads around your new home, but it may add time to your build process. Here's what you can expect.

The Benefit of Seasonal Weight Limits for Roads

Why do public works and transportation departments restrict road usage? The short answer is to preserve our roads. When warmer temperatures arrive, the ground thaws from the surface down. That means that just underneath the pavement, there's a water-saturated, unstable base layer, and then another layer of frozen earth below. Moisture can't adequately drain downward into the frozen soil and becomes trapped. Daily temperature fluctuations cause a repetitive freeze-thaw cycle that further distresses pavement. When heavy trucks drive over roads in this state, the road surface can buckle, crack, and break down.

"A road is only as good its base. It's a vulnerable time," said Joe DeStefano, Jr., from the Department of Public Works in Lisbon, Wisconsin. He compares this seasonal issue to a much more salient example for homeowners: gravel driveways. If you've driven over gravel after a significant thaw or rainstorm, you're familiar with the sloppy, shifting surface and how much it shows tire tracks. According to Joe, "That's the



same as what happens under the road surface.”

Protecting roads is highly beneficial for homeowners. Municipalities will spend millions on roadways over the course of time, but preventative measures like weight restrictions reduce the amount of costly repeated repairs. If you’re building a new home in one of these municipalities with road weight limits, that means you’ll soon be a taxpayer there! These types of restrictions are put in place to steward your tax dollars smartly and give your community quality, durable roads.

How Road Limits Affect Home Construction

Seasonal weight limits are great for roads (and your future tax bills), but they do extend the timelines of building projects. As you might imagine, it’s impossible to perform many essential construction tasks like pouring a concrete foundation or delivering lumber without bringing in heavy trucks. While some work can continue with materials that are already on site, you can expect major building tasks to be put on hold temporarily.

That begs the question, how long will these restrictions be in place? Most local areas will begin enforcing weight limits on Monday, March 8, but the end date is more difficult to determine. A timeframe of 3-6 weeks is not uncommon.

“It’s all weather-dependent,” said Matt Janecke, Assistant Director of Utilities & Public Works for Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. A deep freeze can extend the restrictions by preventing the ground frost from thawing, and a stretch of warm, sunny weather can keep things moving along. Matt added that restrictions typically last 3-4 weeks, but the decision to allow heavy equipment is based on evidence like frost lines, not timelines.

Joe echoed these sentiments for Lisbon’s plans. Historically, restrictions have remained in place for 3-5 weeks each spring, but what’s more important than watching the calendar is waiting for lower layers of soil to thaw. “Rain and sun move everything in the right direction,” he added.

Both city representatives emphasized that these restrictions are something that happens every year and that they have measures in place to know when it’s time to permit trucks and trailers again. Furthermore, timelines and exact weight limits vary from one municipality to another, so it’s a good idea to check in with your project manager or the public works department for your home’s location to get accurate, timely information. Once the ground is thawed, your Demlang build team will be back in action, bringing you another step closer to your brand new home.

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