

Monmouthshire County Council - Kuper GK5 Blades

Who?

Responsibility for winter maintenance within Monmouthshire is shared between Monmouthshire County Council and the Welsh Assembly Government. The Motorway and Trunk Road network within Monmouthshire is the maintenance responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government and is managed by their agents South Wales Trunk Road Agency. Monmouthshire County Council is the highway authority for the 'county highway network' in the area, with the responsibility for all principal and non-principal classified roads and all unclassified roads.

The County Council pre-salts 525km of roads-approximately 33% of the total length of its highway network. For snow clearance routes, the following priority order is adopted: Major County roads Class 1, 2 and 3 (described as Priority 1 and 2 Routes for Pre-salting), other routes known as urgent medical and important industrial routes, bus service routes, access to private dwellings where a need is identified by the local NHS board and indicated in communications during the winter season, e.g. hospital dialysis required by resident, other Class 3 and unclassified roads giving access to villages, roads serving isolated farms and houses and other roads in the county.

Ploughing only becomes effective when snowfall exceeds 50mm in depth. Lighter falls may call for ploughing where light local drifts have occurred. Ploughing may also be required to remove snow not dispersed by traffic and where traffic is reluctant to use the right-hand lane on a dual carriageway or where traffic is light (eg. at night). When prolonged snowfalls are forecast it will be found useful to plough continuously to prevent build up and the compaction by traffic. Such ploughing can be combined with salting in tandem at a rate of 25-40 g/m² so that a wet base is maintained, says the county's winter service plan.

This means being prepared with the most effective snow clearance equipment is vital for the council.

The challenge:

Monmouthshire has 15 front line ploughs in its fleet that are all active during snow events on 12 different routes in the county, mainly because of the region's mix of high and low ground. The council was finding that it was going through several sets of rubber blades that needed to be replaced on a regular basis. This was not only proving costly but adding to the downtime the spreaders were not working on the network. Sometimes if the rubber blades were being replaced at night, the downtime could be even longer due to the fitters being on split shifts.

The solution:

Monmouthshire spoke to Safecote and it recommended trying the Kuper GK5 blades. The council invested in eight sets, six of which are currently being used and two that are in storage.

“As soon as we used them the spreader drivers were giving nothing but good feedback on their excellent performance in terms of giving us the ability to plough ‘back to black’ every time,” says Mark Watkins, Area Engineer at Monmouthshire County Council. “I remember following two of our ploughs on a challenging route just after we bought them and their performance was perfect in terms of ploughing back to black, which is obviously so essential for the safety of that particular route,” he adds. “Some of the high ground we have in the region can be very challenging with snow drifts etc, but the drivers still report excellent performance from the blades,” he continues.

The Kuper GK5 ‘revolutionary’ snowplough blade offers superior performance over any other blade on the UK market, according to Safecote and the UK local authorities that have purchased them. It offers the ability to plough any surface back to black with the avoidance of damage to objects fixed to the highway including road studs, speed ramps, and iron works. It will leave a clean surface therefore reducing excessive salting generally used to try and de-ice slush/snow residue left behind by standard blades. Experience of performance on the UK network over the last eight years has meant that it is estimated that the GK5 has 20 times the life of a standard rubber blade and reduced time for fixing replacements. This is a must have product that all winter practitioners should have within their toolkit. The blades can be fixed to all standard ploughs.

The council was finding that the rubber blades were wearing very quickly and as well as the cost associated with replacing them and the downtime, this would also sometimes lead to problems on the network with the worn down blades leaving slush and sometimes some snow on the network.

“We have saved an unbelievable amount of money on maintenance costs and downtime and we haven’t even replaced one set yet in four winters-even after dealing with the Beast from the East,” says Mr Watkins. “We will certainly be purchasing more to fit out the rest of our fleet. While they cost more than standard rubber blades the performance is superior and the costs saved on maintenance etc means they are well worth the investment,” he adds. “My advice to anyone thinking of investing would be-try some-it will be worth the investment,” he says.