

PR TIPS PACKAGE



County Road Association OF MICHIGAN

OCTOBER 2016

WINTER PREPAREDNESS: "SHAKE YOUR MAILBOX"

This month's **PR Tips Package** is focused on winter preparedness. This package includes tools to help you educate the public on **proper mailbox positioning**.

In this package you will find:

- "Shake Your Mailbox" PR recommendations document;
- "Shake Your Mailbox" news release template;
- "Shake Your Mailbox" Twitter posts;
- "Shake Your Mailbox" Facebook posts;
- "Shake Your Mailbox" Information Sheet; and
- Proper mailbox positioning talking points sheet.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY...

CRA's Public Relations Committee

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County Road Association
OF MICHIGAN

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Date: October 17, 2016
To: Managing Directors, PR Staff
From: Christina Strong, Communication Specialist
CRA, Public Relations Committee
Subject: Winter Preparedness: “Shake Your Mailbox” 2016 PR Tips Package

While we had a full winter preparedness PR Tips package planned to assist county road agencies, many of you are eager to get the “Shake Your Mailbox” component – so we’re putting it out now. The tools in this PR Tips package can help you educate local residents on why they should perform mailbox maintenance in October.

Please feel free to contact me for additional help or resources at 517.482.1189 or at cstrong@micountyroads.org.

Sincerely,

Christina Strong
Communication Specialist

P.S. We are creating a video on pre-winter mailbox maintenance, and hope to have it posted on YouTube by the end of the month. We’ll send you a separate notice when it’s live!

CRA PR Recommendations for “Shake Your Mailbox”

Winter maintenance is a big part of the overall functions of a county road agency in Michigan. When everything is going smoothly, county road agencies’ work can go unnoticed. But if there’s a “bump in the road,” it seems like everybody calls!

Help your community get ahead of the plows with helpful tips for securing mailboxes. This October, we are providing a list of recommendations for county road agencies to publicize and encourage local residents to check and properly position their mailboxes.

Here are some ideas for getting the word out:

- Localize the “Shake Your Mailbox” news release template.
- Use the social media posts included in this PR Tips package to connect with your social media followers.
- Share the “Shake Your Mailbox” information sheet at public meetings and events where your county road agency will be participating or attending.
- Use the talking points for TV and radio interviews. Media should be receptive to winter preparedness at this time. Do a quality check on the TV station’s own mailbox!
- Create a special page on your website with step-by-step instructions on how a resident can check his or her mailbox to make sure it’s secure.



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CRA PR Tips for County Road Agencies

Shake Your Mailbox News Release

XXX County encourages residents to shake their mailboxes this month

XXXXX County Road Commission asks Michigan residents to prepare for winter by shaking their yet this month.

“A mailbox is the only object allowed by law that homeowners can place in the road right-of-way. The location and construction of mailboxes must conform to the rules and regulations of the United States Postal Service and nationwide standards established by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials,” said XXXXX.

The road right-of-way is typically 66 feet wide or 33 feet from the centerline of the road. The right-of-way is maintained by county road commissions and is used for residential and public utility purposes.

Over the years, a mailbox post can rot or become wobbly. By grabbing and shaking it, a resident can know if it's secure. Snow coming off a plow going 35 miles per hour has surprising force and digging a mailbox out and reinstalling it in frozen ground is no picnic.

“Our number-one job is to maintain a safe and efficient road and right-of-way system,” XXXXX said. “Responsibility for ensuring a mailbox is strong, goes to the resident.”

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and XXXXX County Road Commission have policies in place regarding replacement of mailboxes that have obviously been hit by a snowplow. However, road agencies are not responsible for mailbox damage caused by standard snow removal operations. The road commission does have some important advice for residents.

Residents should prepare mailboxes for winter by tightening screws and ensuring the post and box are secure enough to endure large amounts of snow that is thrown. If the mailbox moves when shaken, the box may need to be repaired or replaced before winter.

“We will be out in coming weeks preparing for winter maintenance operations,” XXXXX said. “Each fall we find mailboxes that pose a serious roadside hazard to motorists and a liability risk for homeowners. Damage to posts and receptacles can often be prevented by proper routine maintenance.”

If you have questions on what is permitted, please contact XXXXX.

XXXXX County residents who are unable to check for mailbox damage or make the needed repairs can contact XXXXX. (Insert information if working with a local community organization such as the Area Agency on Aging.)

The XXXXX County Road Commission has served XXXXX County in improving county roads and bridges for XXXXX years.

CRA PR Tips Social Media Posts for “Shake Your Mailbox”

Twitter:

Taking time to check rotting posts and loose screws now, can prevent serious headaches later. Make this Saturday “Shake Your Mailbox Day.” (138 characters)

Much of the damage to mailboxes caused by snowplows can be prevented by proper maintenance. “Shake Your Mailbox” this Saturday. (127 characters)

Residents should prepare for winter by ensuring mailboxes can withstand the force of thrown snow. “Shake Your Mailbox this weekend!” (126 characters)

Make this Saturday “Shake Your Mailbox Day.” All #MI residents are encouraged to prepare their mailbox for #winter. (113 characters)

Facebook:

If your mailbox moves when you shake it, it could be knocked over by snow thrown from a passing snowplow. Make this Saturday “Shake Your Mailbox Day!” (Include a photo of a mailbox).

This October, “Shake Your Mailbox.” Taking time now to prepare your mailbox for winter, will prevent serious headaches later. For more information (Insert your website link where people can find more information).

Save your mailbox! Take time to secure your mailbox before winter. (Insert your website link where people can find more information).

According to the International Society for Agricultural Safety and Health, each year as many as 100 people globally are killed in accidents involving rural mailboxes. Many others are permanently injured when mailboxes and their supports penetrate a vehicle’s windshield. Keep people safe in your community by making sure your mailbox is properly secured.



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“Shake Your Mailbox” Information Sheet

“SHAKE YOUR MAILBOX” IN OCTOBER

What does “Shake Your Mailbox” mean?

- “Shake Your Mailbox” is an activity designed to get homeowners involved in proactive mailbox maintenance.
- Road agencies recognize damage to mailboxes is inconvenient to residents, and want to minimize frustrations by encouraging preventative maintenance in autumn.
- Although the Michigan Department of Transportation and many local road agencies have policies for addressing mailboxes damaged by a direct snowplow hit during winter maintenance operations, they vary by county. One thing is consistent; road agencies are not responsible for mailbox damage caused by snow thrown when clearing the roadway.
- Local community organizations are encouraged to help homeowners and renters who may be unable to check for mailbox damage and make needed repairs.

What should residents do?

- Residents should prepare mailboxes for winter by tightening screws and ensuring the post and box itself are secure enough to endure large amounts of thrown snow. If the mailbox or post moves when shaken, perhaps the box or post should be repaired or replaced before winter.

What you need to know about mailboxes?

- Mailboxes are one of the only objects allowed by law to be placed in the road right-of-way.
- The location and construction of mailboxes must conform to specific rules and regulations. Information on rules and regulations are available on the United States Postal Service (USPS) website at <https://www.usps.com/manage/mailboxes.htm>.

- According to the International Society for Agricultural Safety and Health, each year as many as 100 people globally are killed in accidents involving rural mailboxes. Many others are permanently injured when mailboxes and their supports penetrate a vehicle's windshield.
- A mailbox that is not secure may also become a liability risk for homeowners. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety warns "private individuals and corporations, as well as governmental entities, may be liable for their roles in creating or maintaining highway hazards."

Mailbox construction tips for Michigan residents

- Only one support should be used per box or group of boxes.
- Wood posts should be no more than 4 ½ inches diameter if round, 4" x 4" inches if rectangular.
- Metal pipes should be standard steel or aluminum with no more than a 2-inch inside diameter.
- Supports should yield or collapse if struck. They should bend or fall away from a vehicle so as not to pose a deadly threat to drivers.
- Supports cannot be fitted with an anchor plate (metal post), embedded over 24 inches into the ground, nor set in concrete.
- Mailboxes must be constructed of sheet metal, plastic or similar weight materials, with weight not to exceed 11 pounds.
- The United States Postal Service asks that roadside mailboxes be 36 to 42 inches off the ground, and 8 to 12 inches behind the shoulder or the curb.
- A mailbox and its support will be considered hazardous to motorists when the support exceeds the described structural limitations. This could create a liability concern for the homeowner.
- Any mailbox and its support considered to be a hazard should be removed from the road right-of-way and replaced.

Michigan's state and local road agencies follow the standards published by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials in "A Guide for Erecting Mailboxes on Highways."



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“Shake Your Mailbox” Talking Points

- To keep motorists safe, there is an enforceable road right-of-way that’s usually 33 feet from the center on both sides of the road. County road commissions are responsible for the right-of-way.
- Mailboxes are the only objects residents can legally place in the road right-of-way.
- The U.S. Postal Service has regulations for mailbox size, weight and height. However, most homeowners are unaware of rules governing construction and installation of mailboxes. More information on mailbox regulations can be found at <https://www.usps.com/manage/mailboxes.htm>.
- Michigan’s state and local road agencies follow the standards published by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials in the Roadside Design Guide.
- Supports should be made of lightweight materials that will easily break away in an accident, and mailboxes must be secured so they cannot become projectiles and penetrate a vehicle’s windshield.
- Don’t let your mailbox or post be an accident waiting to happen. If you have questions on mailbox standards, call your county road agency for more information.