

# **Letter to the Editor: Executive decisions and vigilante safety**

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An executive decision is a decision made by a person of power or authority without the agreement of others or when the person who should make a decision isn't around. The most impactful executive decisions, I feel, are the ones made to protect people from harm or danger.

The evening of Friday December 16, 2016, the city was hit by a mist-storm which started around 4:40 p.m. in the afternoon and did not end until early Saturday morning. Much as I'd like to avoid the phrase 'The Perfect Storm', here's how it might be appropriate:

Wednesday: low 15° - high was 28°, Thursday: low 12° - high was 18° - the ground /pavement was frozen. Friday's low was 17° with high of 32° at 4:30pm humidity was 99% when it started misting – and freezing on contact. Mist is easy to dismiss, it evaporates on a warm windshield and forms and, patiently, builds upon itself to the point that I was able to drive up Prospect Street hill at 5:15 p.m., and cars were sliding down the hill into each other at 6:00 p.m.

I noticed slick streets in North Alton at 5:00 p.m., Icy streets/sidewalks in Downtown Alton at 6:30 p.m. with cars and a tractor-trailer strewn about the top of State at 9th Street and at the top of State Street in front of Sts. Peter & Paul Church around 6:45 p.m. Meanwhile vehicles continued to attempt to descend State Street.

Back to executive decisions; maintenance of Alton's streets fall under the Public Works Department and that's where decisions are made regarding safe roadways/public services. The Police Department is in charge of public safety. The Mayor is in charge of seeing that both departments perform in the best interest of the city. Around 5:00 p.m. the Police Department started fielding calls from the public about traffic accidents and road conditions. Undoubtedly the Street Department began fielding calls around then as well. Dramatically deteriorating road conditions beg the question, at what point was a decision going to be made to reduce a threat to the public safety? Or, in the absence of a department-level decision, why wasn't an executive decision made to reduce the threat faced by the public?

Fortunately, in an isolated case, around 9:30 p.m. a private citizen made an executive decision - or performed an act of vigilante safety - by collecting traffic barricades, from newly completed sewer work, and stringing them across the top of State Street to prevent unsuspecting drivers from endangering themselves or others. So two decisions could have been made, salt the streets or block access high-risk roads. I neither saw nor heard of either happening Friday night.

Saturday morning around 10:00 a.m. I found a cluster of cars compacted into a single mass on Prospect Street hill. The citizen-constructed barricade was in place indicating that State Street remained unsalted. Around 11:30 a.m. a salt truck arrived and, after the public conspired to separate the bulk of the car cluster on Prospect Street hill, it was able to make its way up the street.

In conclusion, I'm dismayed that Alton's fleet of salt trucks remained idle Friday and that neither they nor the Police Department thought to close dangerous roads. I can understand being caught unawares, say between 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m., but after 6:30 p.m. the scope of the situation became apparent, where was the call to action? There are four departments where leadership failed from the Street Department, to Public Works, to the Police Department and ultimately ending at the office of the Mayor.

Those of us who fell, damaged or wrecked our car, walked a distance because car had to be abandoned or were traumatized by what they [saw unfold](#) suggest that a new criteria, walk outside, be used in the decision making process for salting streets or blocking roads.

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