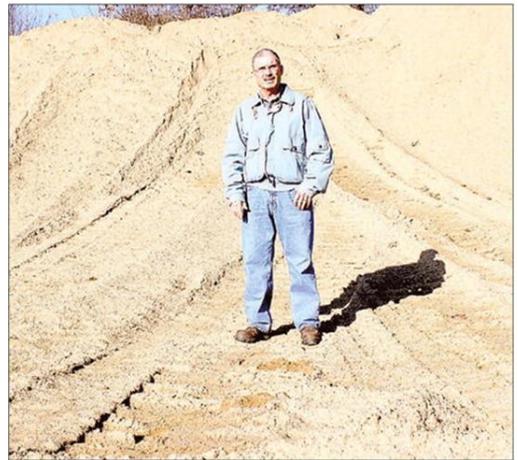


**Braced for winter**

**commission prepared for season**

**By Jef Rietsma**

Journal Correspondent



The St. Joseph County Road Commission is ready for winter, with preparations for the 2015-16 season starting much earlier than what many people might expect.

Chris Minger, managing director of the agency, said planning for a winter season starts with a salt order nearly nine months in advance of the season. “Our raw salt orders usually start in late February-early March, so we try to make a calculation and best case scenario for what we can use and store on hand, and go from there,” Minger said.

Salt is mixed with sand at a ratio of one part salt to 3 1/2 parts sand, Minger said.

“The (sand), to mix it with, we start looking at that the first part of September,” he said.

A 5,000-ton load of sand was delivered recently to the agency’s storage site in Centreville.

**Fewer locations**

The 2015-16 season marks the first time in decades the road commission will work from just two locations instead of three. As part of a three-step process, it has closed its Three Rivers-area garage and will work with crews based in Centreville and Colon Township. By next year, the commission will desert the Colon Township site and keep all its personnel and vehicles in Centreville.

Minger said the cost-saving measure adopted by the commission’s five member board will see its drivers “spiderweb” from Centreville as they head to their assigned routes throughout the county.

“Everybody will leave from here and plow their way to their original route,” Minger said. “With anybody you have on those routes based in those outlying garages, when they need a vehicle repair, those guys would have to come to Centreville anyhow, so the one-location concept has some advantages.”

The road commission, which operates on an annual budget of about \$ 5.6 million, has a maximum of 26 vehicles on the roads in the worst winter conditions, Minger said.