

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## For big rigs, big headaches when roads are icy

**By Tom Belden**  
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The tales that truckers can tell about this week's weather in the Northeast are downright scary - in both human and economic terms.

The companies that help deliver most of the food and other consumer products throughout the region yesterday described the nightmarish challenge they faced trying to make deliveries, with 80-ton tractor-trailers trapped on frozen highways and their customers calling to find out where shipments were.

Among the stories was that of one driver for PSS Warehouse & Transportation Services of Dayton, N.J., who inched his way in reverse for 20 miles down the snow-covered shoulder of westbound Interstate 81 before he found a way to turn around. A driver for Zimmerman Truck Lines, based in Mifflintown, Pa., spent almost 30 hours in the cab of his truck, trapped on Interstate 78.

"The entire week has been fairly chaotic," said Jeff Tucker, chief executive officer of Tucker Co., a Cherry Hill logistics broker that brings together truckers with companies that need products shipped. "Our people are at wit's end trying to cope."

And with February coming to an end, next week could be just as bad for getting shipments where they need to be, trucking company officials said.

Because Monday is Presidents Day, some businesses will be closed, making deliveries impossible, the officials said. Worse, many manufacturers and wholesale distributors of various products rush to move inventory out of their warehouses by the end of each month so they can send a bill to the customer.

"By the middle of next week, it will start to pick up," said Gary Borne, a Moorestown resident who owns PSS Warehouse & Transportation with his brother, Kurt Borne. "But with the backlogs we have, it will be a double whammy."

Borne said among the biggest headaches - and his proudest moments - was a push to get cases of Bumble Bee tuna delivered to 111 Pathmark stores throughout the region. The supermarket chain was advertising a special yesterday on the brand and had to have inventory to meet anticipated demand, he said.

"We've got 108 delivered so far," he said at midafternoon.

Mark Zimmerman, vice president of family-owned Zimmerman Truck Lines, estimated that the company lost \$100,000 in revenue the first two days of disruption, and would lose hundreds of thousands more in revenue before operations returned to normal. Zimmerman, which has about \$45 million a year in revenue, operates 225 trucks carrying a variety of commodities nationwide.

"About 70 percent of our trucks were crippled, either stuck in traffic or they couldn't get to or from a point where they needed to be," Mark Zimmerman said.

Jeff Tucker said about half of the hundreds of truckloads his company had arranged to deliver this week were affected by the weather, either delayed along the way or forced to turn around and return to where they had started.

"The transportation industry is fragile in many ways," he said.

In contrast to the trucking companies, two major regional supermarket chains, Acme Markets and Wegmans Food Stores, were affected by the weather, but officials said they did not have serious problems getting shipments to their stores in the Philadelphia area, company officials said.

Acme spokesman Walt Rubel said most of his company's deliveries to stores were "on time or almost on time."

Jo Natale, a spokeswoman for Wegmans, said the chain's trucks have had to detour around the major interstates for deliveries.

"We had some disruptions and delays, but no major problems," she said. "It has all been transparent to the customer. If there was a product out of stock, there was an alternate product available."

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