Laser accuracy eyed with new snowplow devices in Hooksett

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HOOKSETT – Winter after winter, residents have complained about town plows tearing up the edges of their front yards, curbs or toppling mailboxes.

Now Public Works Director Dale Hemeon hopes he is seeing the light at the end of this treacherous tunnel.

The town has purchased a device that shoots a laser beam about 40 feet in front of a truck, showing the exact spot where the edge of the plow will scrape.

"They're pretty cool," Hemeon said. "It should save me a lot of money down the road by not hitting mailboxes or fences."

Hooksett obtained two LaserLine Guidance Lasers from New England Laser and Transit Co. in Newport at $2,500 apiece when the town purchased two new snowplow trucks a few months ago.

Hooksett plow driver Scott Brown shows the laser mark on a mailbox and explains that he has 6 to 8 inches buffer for the plow. The town of Hooksett has two wing plow lasers in service that will save time and money in repairs to plow trucks from hitting curbs and damage to mailboxes. (THOMAS ROY)

Hemeon said the technology is the modern-day equivalent to "wingmen," who used to operate the wing plow from the passenger side and, with a better viewing angle, could avoid obstacles more effectively.

"Without a wingman, it's a good thing to have," Hemeon said. "Sometimes it's hard to judge the distance."

The town has 10 trucks with snowplows, including the two new laser-equipped trucks.
Four of the trucks are between 10 and 15 years old and are expected to be replaced in the next four years. Hemeon hopes to have lasers on those, too.

With the brand new trucks costing the town $140,000 each, Hemeon said the $2,500 laser is small money to prevent costly mistakes.

"Five years ago, we hit (a utility) pole and the town had to pay $5,000 to replace it," Hemeon said. "It's strictly a thing that should save us money on not ripping up the ground."

LaserLine officials say the GL3000 PMC Guidance Laser took two years to develop. It features a small device that spits bursts of air to keep snow off the front of the lens, which works in temperatures as low as 35 degrees below zero.

According to a LaserLine news release, five lasers are being used on plows for the Washington State Department of Transportation and there have been no accidents reported since its inception.

Six lasers are also being used by the Iowa Department of Transportation.