

Getting to grips with slips

While it isn't exactly water off a duck's back, generally Fiordland copes well with wet weather.

However, sustained downpours cause scouring, exposing loose rock that often trigger larger and more disruptive slips on the Milford Road. It's a hard situation to manage until the rain stops or machinery can divert water away. The Milford Road Alliance team do plenty to help limit the impact of slips on this route, including removing rock material that in large rain events could cause a significant slip or washout. Recent prolonged wet weather caused some slips and flooding on the Milford Road, but road crews managed to sort most of them reasonably quickly.



Heavy rain can scour loose rock and bring down slips like this on to Milford Road.

Late finish to avalanche season

The avalanche season ended recently, with heavy persistent rain washing away much of the established snowpack on the mountains surrounding the Homer Tunnel area that had been a potential risk to the Milford Road. It's been a cold and damp winter on SH94 with these conditions stretching into November, impacting on visitors and local tour operators alike. It seems that wintery conditions are now lingering further into spring. This year that meant wet weather in Te Anau - translating to snow on the mountains in the Homer Tunnel area. Around 480 avalanches were observed this winter along and above the road. Our approach to avalanche management is to reduce, through use of explosives, large snow volumes to avoid large destructive avalanches that could cause lengthy road closures.



Weather station maintenance underway on a station located high above Milford Sound.

Stopping restrictions



A camper van stuck early morning on the eastern approach to the Homer Tunnel.

Stopping restrictions are in place around the Homer Tunnel and some earthworks have been completed to reduce the risk to motorists of a rockfall reaching the road. This occurred most recently in May near the eastern entrance to the Homer Tunnel, just prior to the start of avalanche season. This fall nearly hit traffic and people who were out of their vehicles. We then moved quickly, putting stopping locations some 200m further back from the tunnel on the eastern side of the tunnel, to create a safer stopping location. This will remain until further investigations and options are considered to protect road users from rockfalls in the Homer Saddle area.

An area of change we've had to manage this year is much greater use of the road very early on winter mornings and at night by rental vehicles. For the safety of drivers, this has led to us having to close overnight more often when snow or ice is forecast to road level. If anyone must travel on the road during these times we encourage them before the leave to check the latest road conditions at www.milfordroad.co.nz

Summer work underway

Building a new slow vehicle bay near Sinks Bridge and significant maintenance work inside the Homer Tunnel are part of this year's busy summer work programme. Tunnel work starts in February/March to take advantage of the last of the warmer weather and to avoid major travel disruption during the busy summer visitor season. The road surface in the tunnel has reached the end of its economic life and needs upgrading. Work includes laying new asphalt and some further concrete lining of the tunnel walls. Information on times and days when the road is affected by this job will be made available closer to when work gets underway. For the summer season we have returned to our regular email updates on Tuesday and Fridays. These cover off any road issues or delays. If you would like to receive these please email office@milfordroad.co.nz

