

**LOAD LIMITS
MAXIMUM WEIGHTS**

Single Axle:

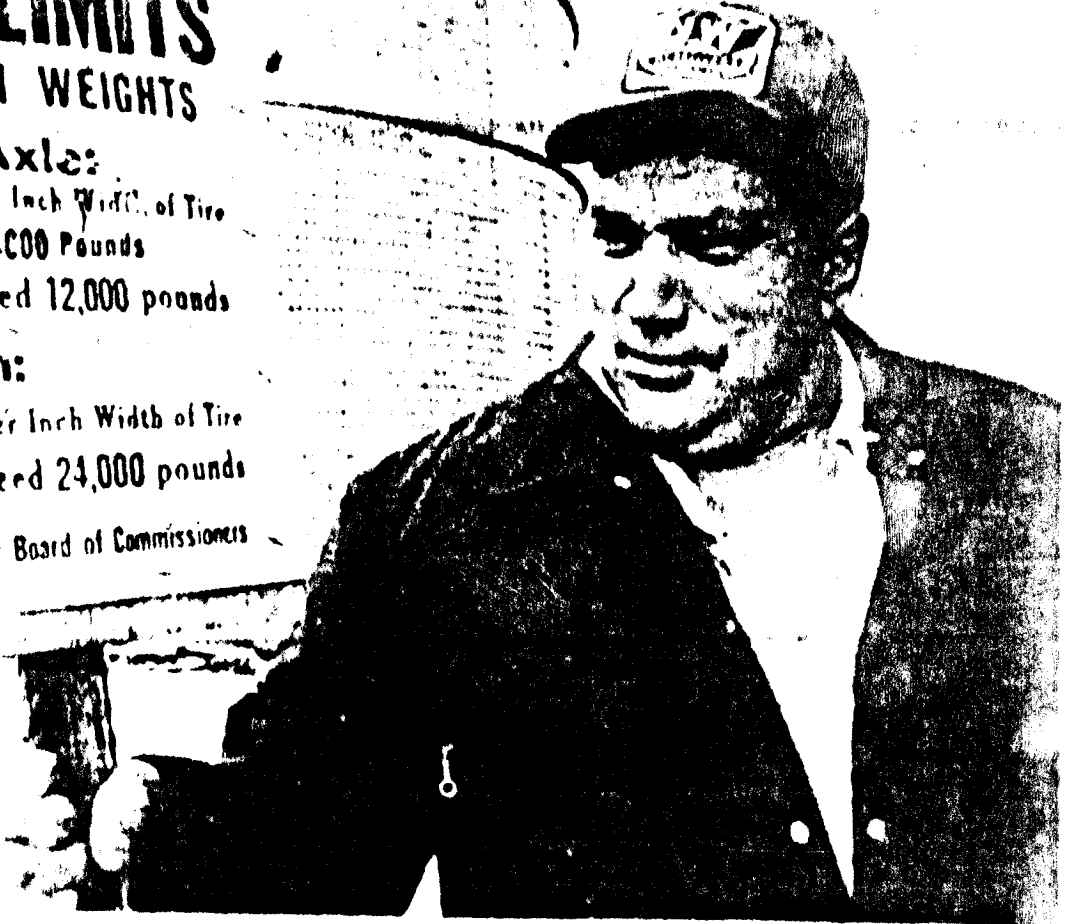
300 Pounds Per Inch Width of Tire
PLUS 2,000 Pounds

Not To Exceed 12,000 pounds

Tandem:

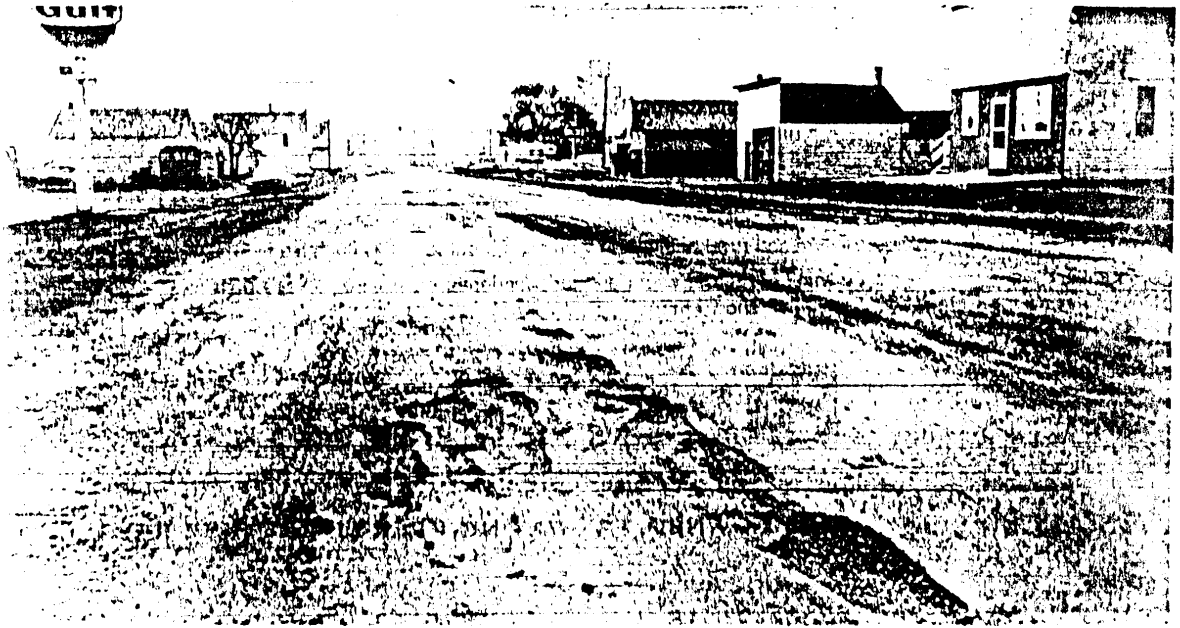
300 Pounds Per Inch Width of Tire
Not To Exceed 24,000 pounds

Cavalier County Board of Commissioners



Nekoma Mayor Bill Verwey (above) considers one of the load restriction signs he placed on his town's main street to take the truck pressure off. At left, aerial photo shows cement plant at southwest edge of Nekoma, with route through town and new road indicated. (Forum Photos by John Anderson)

next spring



Nekoma, ND - The road dispute between the mayor of Nekoma and an Antiballistic Missile site contractor seems to have gone into hibernation for the winter.

The controversy boiled furiously between Bill Verwey, the mayor of this small Cavalier County community a dozen miles south of Langdon, and officials of the Hallett Construction Company, a contractor providing cement for the nation's first Safeguard ABM site.

It all started because Hallett trucks are hauling cement from a new plant southwest of Nekoma to the ABM site some four miles northeast of the town. The trucks took the most direct route from plant to site - right down Nekoma's main street. But not any more.

Even though Hallett manager Robert Freil and Mayor Verwey have both expressed hope for "no more trouble" concerning use of the village's main street as a cement truck route, a dispute seems inevitable to resurface next spring if rain and spring thaws make soup of an escape route that Hallett built across a wheat field.

The dispute had its beginnings in a lack of funds from the US Bureau of Public Roads to make street improvements in Nekoma so that its main street would be adequate to handle the hulking cement transports. The state Highway Department was funded by Public Roads last spring, when construction began, to blade, gravel, and intermittently oil Nekoma's main street.

It is common procedure for the Public Roads to provide funds to maintain roads used by contractors who are working on federal projects, according to an Army Corps of Engineers spokesman. And, in terms of maintaining a route on which Hallett could move concrete at a normal rate of speed, the \$10,000 grading and graveling job by the state Highway Department was adequate.

But, the fact that the route goes through Verwey's city makes the road work inadequate, from the mayor's point of view. The trucks have dished out the road as much as a foot in some places, Verwey says, and this will cause it to drift shut during winter months.

It was the dust problem, however, that led Nekoma's City Council to create load restrictions Oct. 17, barring the cement trucks from pounding over main street with more than 12,000 pounds per rear axle. Dust created by the trucks is "intolerable," Verwey said, and, as to efforts by the Highway Department to hold the dirt down with oil. Verwey said the oil "only holds it down for about a day, and then we get oily dust instead."

So, the stage was set for a showdown last Monday morning when Hallett trucks were to resume hauling, and a crew from the ND Truck Regulatory Division was on hand to enforce Nekoma's load limits. Hallett was expected to begin hauling half loads (24,000 pounds on tandems), and Verwey threatened to lower the restriction to the point that Hallett could carry nothing.

Hallett's Freil, however, countered by weighing his own vehicles before they left the cement plant, located on the southwest edge of the village. He then sent the trucks out of town on a township road, in the opposite direction from the ABM site (northeast of the town). Freil's trucks continued to US Highway 81; travelled the highway past Nekoma and entered the ABM site by way of an access road currently under construction. Shortly, the truck regulatory crew picked up their scales and intercepted a Hallett truck on the township road, which was not posted. The truck was weighed and Hallett was charged with an overload of 4,600 pounds.

Freil, in order to avoid immediate court proceedings, paid a fine of \$94 - but did so under protest. The protest led to a re-check of arithmetic, and - you guessed it - the Truck Regulatory Division found an adding mistake of 10,000 pounds putting the truck 5,400 pounds under load limit. A voided check was returned to Freil.

But, while Hallett trucks were taking the long route with half loads, equipment from Morrison-Knudsen Construction Company, the prime contractor at the ABM site, arrived at its associate's cement-mixing plant and began building an escape route for the hemmed-in subcontractor. A low-grade dirt road, built across a wheat field on a strip about 50 feet wide and a quarter of a mile long, was completed when work started Tuesday morning.

The new route is two-thirds of a mile longer than the trans-Nekoma path, Freil said, but driving time is less. Trucks now travel directly west to Highway 81, and approach the ABM site on the access road.

When Hallett trucks began travelling the new route, Nekoma and Hallett reached a parting of ways. Said Freil, "We're not here to fight with the city of Nekoma - we're here to deliver concrete to the ABM site." And Verwey chimed in with: "As far as we're concerned, the problem is solved - except for repairing our road. The dust problem is settled."

It was not the first time that activity involving the ABM site caused Verwey to be concerned about the road through Nekoma. Last spring, when a horde of anti-war protesters descended upon the area to demonstrate against the ABM site, Verwey bladed a four-foot trench across the road into Nekoma. He said it was to install a culvert, but he smiled when he said it. And it certainly kept non-Nekoma traffic out of town during the demonstration (which centered on a plowed field north of town).

According to George H. Seaworth of Bismarck, an official with the Bureau of Public Roads, Verwey's street will be repaired. Seaworth said that Verwey "isn't ready to talk about it yet - he still wants pavement." The Bureau has authority to "maintain and repair" roads used as federal construction routes. Seaworth said, however, "we cannot upgrade a road."

The Bureau could provide funds to re-shape the dished-out street, Seaworth said, but a seven-inch layer of asphalt would cost about \$150,000, and is out of the question.

So, Hallett has a convenient route to the ABM site, and Nekoma's main street suffers no more. Except for spring rains, the problem would be solved when Nekoma's street is repaired.

The mayor is waiting for next spring when he says the Hallett escape route will be submerged in spring runoff water. The emergency road lies in the lower portion of a wheat field, where a farmer wouldn't venture with his tractor until the rains have finished.

Whether or not Hallett will need another route next spring is yet to be seen. But Verwey is certain there will be no cement trucks in his village unless he hears the magic word - "pavement."

Verwey considers his dispute a test case. "This is a concern over the whole corner of the state. They (federal project contractors) have been breaking up one road and moving to the next." Verwey said that if Nekoma gets some road work, nearby communities might also "think it's worth the trouble."

"But one thing is for sure," Verwey said, "if we don't get nothin', we don't give nothin'."