



Winter Preparations 2016

Background: *As we approach the 2016-17 winter season, it is important to remember that weather incidents have a major loss impact on the NJPHA-JIF, both through employee injuries and resident slips and falls. Pre-planning and executing the plan are critical to reduction of loss costs.*

Administration

Whether you contract snow removal or perform it with in-house personnel, maintain a log of all activities, documenting start of removal or salting, completion time, inspection for refreeze, and reapplication of deicer. Take time-stamped pictures of your efforts when completed. A sample log follows this guide

If you contract snow removal, verify that contracts are in place with your vendors. Make sure you have up to date certificates of insurance from them. Have a documented pre-season meeting to go over notification and communication processes, problem areas on the property, and general expectations for response (e.g., more than one inch of snow accumulation, and or sleet and iced over conditions). Establish property-specific priorities for removal like:

- Fire lanes must be open for emergency equipment. Fire hydrants must be free of snow and accessible at all times.
- Main entrances, ADA ramps and curb cuts, weather exposed stairs, and primary sidewalks and parking lots should be cleared as early as possible.
- Parking lots, secondary entrances, and other low-usage areas should be cleaned by noon (or x hours after snowfall ends).

Snow piles should be located to use but not obstruct available drainage facilities. Where feasible, snow piles should not be placed uphill of where melting snow may cause a walking surface to become wet and then more hazardous when refrozen.

Consider acquiring a **subscription to a weather service** with credentialed meteorologists. While it may appear that the forecast information is not markedly different from free media forecasts, reliance on local media outlets does not provide documentation of forecaster credentials, and likely do not provide the kind of ongoing documentation of conditions that may be required in defense of a slip/fall claim several years later.

Will you be bringing in extra staff for the snow event? Make sure you have current phone numbers, and alternate means of contacting them. Using full time staff? Consider having them onsite the night before or at nearby lodging.

Have an adequate supply of floor mats for entrances that will allow you to switch them out as they become saturated.

Make sure administrative personnel are aware of how they will be informed on closures or delayed openings.

Employee Safety

Snow Shoveling:

- Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unfamiliar exercise, such as shoveling snow can make other medical conditions worse. Stretch during and after working outside to help prevent injury and muscle strain.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothes frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly. Bring a change of clothes with you on a snow day.
- Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth with a scarf when outdoors.
- Falling is the most common injury when removing snow and ice. Wear shoes with a good tread and layers of absorbing socks. Slip-on cleats (like *Yaktrax*®, or *Stabilicers*) can help employees navigate slippery surfaces more safely than boots alone.
- Separate your hands at least 12" on the shovel. By creating space between your hands, you can increase your leverage on the shovel.
- Lift with your legs, not your back. Make sure your knees are bending and straightening to lift the shovel instead of leaning forward and straightening with the back. Step toward the direction you are throwing the snow; don't twist your torso.
- A blade full of snow can weigh 25 lb. or more; skim accumulations in 1"-2" layers.
- Push the snow. It is easier and better for your back to push the snow rather than lift it. Never throw snow over your shoulders.

Snow Throwers

Injuries most frequently occurred when users tried to clear the auger / collector or discharge chute with their hands. The following tips can help prevent snow thrower injuries:

- Give all equipment a thorough check *before* bad weather hits. Make sure all guards are in place. Perform needed preventive maintenance, including changing spark plugs.
- Stop the engine and use a long stick to unclog wet snow and debris from the machine. Do not use your hands to unclog a snow thrower! Blocked auger/collectors and impellers can "spring back" when cleared and may cause personal injury, even with the engine stopped.
- Always keep hands and feet away from all moving parts.
- Never leave the machine running in an enclosed area, or unattended in any location.
- Add fuel to the tank outdoors before starting the machine; do not add gasoline to a running or hot engine. Always keep the gasoline can capped, and store gasoline outside of residential dwellings, and away from ignition sources.
- If you have an electric-powered snow thrower, be aware of where the power cord is at all times. Make sure you use a grounded extension cord, of a rating recommended by the manufacturer of the snow thrower.
- Caution employees using snow throwers to be aware of pedestrians who could be struck by the discharge. Objects other than snow will usually be thrown **farther** than the snow discharge, so be alert to where the discharge chute is directed.

Make sure that all employees are clear on these practices. Conduct a "tool box talk" on the subject if inclement weather threatens, and have supervisors continue to coach all employees throughout the snow emergency.

De-Icing Materials:

After shoveling or using a snow blower to remove snow, there always seems to be a thin layer leftover that quickly turns to ice as it melts and is compacted by tires or feet. It can be removed by sprinkling it with ice-melting granules. Caution should be used in choosing a chemical, because some chemicals can be corrosive to such metal items as cars or can damage concrete. Following are primary chemicals found in most commercial de-icing products; read product labels carefully to determine content and check any warnings about use. Make sure that this substance is included in your collection of safety data sheets.

- **Sodium Chloride (rock salt).** This chemical is commonly used and is typically the least expensive de-icing material. It is effective down to about **5 degrees** and can be spread on top of ice and snow. It is not harmful to concrete but can corrode reinforcing steel. The salt is also more toxic to plants than some other products when it is washed into the soil.
- **Potassium Chloride** will melt ice at temperatures down to **10 degrees** and if used judiciously, will not harm vegetation. However, it can leave a white residue that may be tracked indoors and it can corrode metal.
- **Calcium Chloride** can melt ice down to **25 degrees below zero** but does not prevent refreezing. It is less harmful to plants and concrete if used sparingly, but can corrode metal and can leave a residue that will harm carpets, tile and shoes. It can also irritate eyes and skin.
- **Liquid potassium acetate** is a newer product effective to **15 degrees below zero** and can be applied with a garden sprayer *before* snow falls. It is biodegradable and listed as safe on vegetation and non-corrosive, however it can be costly.
- **Sand:** Sand is applied to provide traction for cars and pedestrians but it does not work well as a de-icer. It is often used as a compliment to de-icing materials.

Parking Lots / Sidewalks

- Shovel all sidewalks adjacent to your property to the bare pavement. This includes any sidewalks outside your fence lines and to the sides/rear of your property.
- Clear a path at least 36" wide (not just shovel width). This allows space wide enough for someone using wheelchair, walker or stroller.
- Strategically pile snow. Don't create new problems in the street or sidewalk when clearing your property. Keep street storm drains clear of snow and report clogged drains. The snow will melt, and effective drainage protects streets from icing over and developing potholes.
- Chop or melt all ice. Ice is the primary cause of falls; it is not enough to simply remove the snow.
- Clear snow around any fire hydrants near your properties. Seconds count when a fire occurs and it is critical for firefighters to find and access hydrants.
- Shovel frequently. Do not wait until the snow piles up. Shovel intermittently after two (2) inches of snow has fallen to maintain safe conditions and prevent injury when clearing snow and ice.

- Maintain all parking lots free of puddling – water should drain easily. Areas that accumulate water in warm wet weather can become “ice-rinks” when freezing weather hits. Do not shovel snow into the street storm drains. Direct all downspouts so that water is not allowed to re-freeze on walkways.
- Maintain adequate lighting in parking areas, and on sidewalks. Replace burnt out bulbs promptly, and watch for instances where tree growth may be blocking light.
- Designate pedestrian crossing areas in parking lots and clearly identify speed bumps as well as curbs.
- Paint all car stops a contrasting color and allow them to be placed only on exterior edges of parking lots. No one should have to step over a car stop.
- Make sure you have handrails on all steps/stairs and ramps with three or more steps or a steep incline.
- **Use the attached log (or similar) to document your snow and ice removal activity.** This simple act can be invaluable in proving your efforts are recognized in defense of a claim.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact your risk management consultant, or NJPHA-JIF safety director, Jim Rhoads at 610-397-5061 or by e-mail at james_rhoads@pmagroup.com.

IMPORTANT NOTICE - The information and suggestions presented by PMA Insurance Group in this risk control technical guide are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related or other laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter the information and suggestions to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies.

SALT/SWEEP LOG

Property: _____
(Name of location)

To be completed as needed during/following snow, sleet, or other conditions that may affect walking surfaces

| Date d/m/y | Time Started | Time Completed | Weather Conditions | Specific Area | Work performed (shovel, sweep, salt) | Name of Person or crew completing work | General comments on conditions, |
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**Comments should focus on condition of premises after snow removal, also on complaints, accidents, or unusual circumstances.*

Signature: _____

Date signed: _____