



Pre-Planning Fire Emergencies – Part 2

Background: *When a property event occurs, it is too late to conduct the pre-planning that can help emergency responders act efficiently and effectively. This report completes pre-planning tips from last month's bulletin.*

Snow

Winter brings additional grounds maintenance concerns for properties in the form of snow. Snow removal is a routine task performed by site staff to ensure that the occupants have a clear path of egress from the building, to a public way of access. Snow also is a concern for fire and rescue services. During winter months, the degree of access to doors, windows, and fire protection equipment is often hampered by snow.

Walkways

While the walkway from an exit door to the street is usually cleared of snow, that walkway may be too narrow for responder access. The average width of a stretcher or rescue board is 2'. A fire fighter will take up at least the same space when walking with equipment. So, when responders carry a rescue board with a patient on it from a building (standing on each side of the board) they collectively require 6 ft. of space. During good weather, this does not present a challenge because the ground is clear for the responders to walk on.

Generally, a site will remove snow from a walkway, creating a path that is equal in width to the exit door. In most cases, this results in a walkway of approximately 3 ft., which leaves at least one responder trying to struggle through the snow in winter. However, if the site staff was to clear a 6 ft. path for the walkway, the responders could easily walk to the waiting ambulance with the rescue board or stretcher.

Access to Fire Protection

Time lost reaching post indication valves (PIVs), fire department connections (FDCs), and yard hydrants can lead to unchecked fire growth. While site staff often clear snow from around hydrants, access to PIVs and FDCs is often overlooked. Two different types of property damage can occur because of delays reaching these devices. The first occurs when the fire department is delayed getting to hydrants and FDCs. This delay allows for continued fire growth while the responders establish a water supply to the building either to support fixed protection or for manual fire control efforts. The second type of damage occurs when the responders are delayed in shutting down fixed protection using the PIVs. In this case, continued water flow contributes to property damage.

A walkway should be provided to fire protection equipment and maintained year round. These walkways do not need to be as wide as the ones previously discussed, but they should be at least 3-ft. wide to allow for access while dragging hoses. Additionally, 3 ft. of snow should be cleared from around fire hydrants and PIVs to allow fire fighters to walk around them.

Vegetation

Like snow, vegetation can hamper responder access. Overgrown weeds can hide critical fire protection equipment, lead to slips and trips, and hamper efficient operations. Thus, proper grounds care should be applied during non-winter months to ensure free access to the property. Landscaping within 5 ft. of structures should be limited to nonflammable materials, such as artificial mulches and high-moisture-content annuals and perennials. Keep grass within 30 ft. of structures mowed to less than 4-in (10-cm) high.

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If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact your risk management consultant, or NJPHA-JIF safety director, Jim Rhoads at 610-937-2694 or by e-mail at james_rhoads@pmagroup.com.

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