

Special Alert: Winter Storm

Background: Should the National Weather Service issue a **Blizzard Watch** (meaning that snow and strong winds will combine to produce a blinding snow (near zero visibility), deep drifts, and life-threatening wind chill, but timing and exact location is still uncertain) , for much of the area covered by the NJPHA-JIF, the following should be implemented.

Pre-Planning

- If using a snow removal service, confirm their state of readiness, and your expectations.
- Start all equipment and assure that it is all ready for use.
- For your internal team, conduct a toolbox meeting and discuss plans. If staff is going home at the end of the day Friday, make sure you have current hard line and cell phone numbers. Consider getting local accommodations to keep staff close at hand.

Employee Safety

Shoveling snow is a very strenuous activity that can cause overexertion and back injuries. Go over these tips for employees to reduce these exposures:

- If you experience pain of any kind, stop immediately and seek assistance.
- Choose a shovel that is right for you. A curved handle that is the correct length enables you to keep your back straight when shoveling. The length is correct when you can slightly bend your knees, flex your back 10 degrees or less, and hold the shovel comfortably in your hands at the start of the “shoveling stroke.”
- Push the snow, do not lift it. Pushing puts far less strain on the spine than lifting.
- Remember that wet snow as we are expected to get can be very heavy. One full shovel load can weigh as much as 25 lbs.
- Be sure your muscles are warm before you start shoveling. Cold, tight muscles are more likely to sprain or strain than warm, relaxed muscles.
- When you grip the shovel, make sure your hands are at least 12 inches apart. By creating distance between your hands, you increase the leverage and reduce the strain on your body.
- Shoveling technique is very important. Do not bend at the waist. Scoop small amounts of snow in the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it. Holding a shovel of snow with your arms outstretched puts too much weight on your spine. Never remove deep snow all at once; do it piecemeal. Shovel an inch or two; then take another inch off. Rest and repeat if necessary. In addition, remember to move your feet rather than twisting your back.
- Pace yourself by taking frequent breaks to gently stretch your back, arms, and legs.
- Keep dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing loses much of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly away from the body.
- Take small steps on wet and icy walkways. Use handholds to stabilize yourself when they are available. Asphalt and oiled surfaces can also be hazardous because rainwater may produce an oil sheen and create slippery walking conditions.

Resident Injuries

- Make user mats are available and can be changed when saturated.
- Discourage residents from going out – consider a storm party in your community room and ride it out together. Coach residents to get any needed medications immediately (before the storm hits).
- Cut paths in sidewalks at least 36" wide to allow for pedestrians in both directions.
- **Keep a log of snow and ice removal activity** – this is critical to defending claims long after the snow melts.

Property Protection

- Move any storage that is subject to water damage to higher areas.
- Check sprinklered areas for air intrusion that can lead to pipe breaks and lead to flooding. Spigots that may be prone to freezing should be left running at a trickle to reduce pressure in the pipe.
- Prioritize keeping drains cleared to reduce ponding, subsequent icing, and flooding as the snow melts.
- Visually check roof lines and flashing as high winds can force precipitation into small gaps and cause large problems.

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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