Division *of*
Risk Management

Protecting People and Property from Snow and Ice

Winter weather brings a critical challenge for property managers: keeping properties safe, accessible, and compliant with local regulations during snow and ice events. Snow and ice removal is much more than just clearing the path—it's a vital task for **protecting people, managing risks, and ensuring business continuity.** Since the majority of slip-and-fall incidents occur in snowy or icy conditions, proactive preparation is essential to protect yourself and others.

1. Preparing for Winter Conditions: Framework

Effective winter safety begins with preparation. Before the first storm hits, stakeholders should establish clear plans, assign responsibilities, and communicate procedures to ensure a safe and compliant winter season.

Broken out into a simple table, you can see the key elements involved:

Action	Description
Plan Ahead	Create and annually review a detailed written removal plan
Be Proactive	Monitor weather forecasts and pre-treat surfaces when appropriate
Monitor Conditions	Conduct frequent checks before, during, and after weather events
Promote Awareness	Communicate safety protocols to all staff and visitors
Document All Incidents	Use detailed logs and reports for all removal activities and accidents

2. Mitigating Risk: The Core of Snow Safety

One of the most important reasons for robust snow and ice removal is **mitigating liability.** Winter conditions significantly increase the risk of slip-and-fall injuries, a leading concern for any state entity.

- **Financial and Reputational Risk:** Failure to maintain safe conditions can result in significant lawsuits and insurance claims, which can cost thousands of dollars. Beyond the financial costs, state agencies also face potential reputational damage and business disruptions.

Snow and Ice Logs: Your Best Legal and Financial Defense

For facility managers and agencies, maintaining detailed snow and ice logs is crucial.

- **Legal Defense:** Logs serve as a legal and financial defense, demonstrating that the state agency took **reasonable steps** to prevent accidents and complied with safety standards. They are a valuable defense against slip-and-fall claims.
- **Proof of Due Diligence:** Proper logs act as written proof of the agency's diligence in removing snow and ice.
- **Operational Benefits:** Logs are a valuable record-keeping tool that helps property managers match up and verify invoices from snow removal subcontractors.

3. Proactive Planning: Preparing Before the Storm Hits

Create a written snow and ice removal plan in advance of wintery conditions. The plan should include an outline of responsibilities, staffing details, communications, and the pre-staging of equipment and supplies.

A robust snow plan should outline how to handle these key issues:

- **Develop a Snow and Ice Removal Log** to document activities. Build in a review process to ensure your program is working as intended.
- **Precipitation Threshold:** Define the specific amount of snow or ice that necessitates a removal service.
- **Timing:** Determine when snow removal and de-icing should begin (e.g., before ice forms, or after 2 inches of snow).
- **Piling Locations:** Designate where the snow will be piled to avoid sightline obstructions or blocking drainage.
- **Drainage:** Identify the location of onsite drainage and plan how snowmelt will affect it.
- **Securely Place Foul Weather Mats** at all building entrances. Ensure mats are placed securely, lay flat to prevent tripping, and extend across a person's path of travel.
- **Post Warning Signs** in high-hazard areas (e.g., areas prone to refreezing or overhead ice).
- **Planning for the Unpredictable:** This unpredictability requires flexible contracts and strategies to handle unexpected, severe, or long-duration storms.

4. Responding to Incidents: Reporting & Documentation

Encourage employees to report hazardous conditions or accidents as soon as possible so corrective action can be taken promptly. When an accident occurs on your property, take the following immediate steps:

- **Complete an Incident Report** immediately, gathering witness statements.
- **Document Current Conditions** (e.g., was it actively snowing, was the area salted, what was the temperature?).
- **Photograph the Accident Scene** before any cleanup or changes are made.
- **Gather Videos of the Incident**—Many of our facilities have video surveillance monitoring in halls and entryways which can provide valuable insight or capture the accident occurring. Save a copy whenever applicable so footage doesn't get overwritten or deleted.
- **Upload** all gathered evidence into the claim upon filing for the Adjuster to review.

Documenting the Scene:

To help protect your financial interests and resolve claims quickly, take comprehensive photos of the alleged accident scene.

- **Context Photos:** Take a series of photos leading up to the exact location of the alleged mishap to show the path of travel and overall conditions.
- **Close-Ups:** Focus the camera within a 1-to-3-foot range for close-ups of small items, the walking surface, or the specific hazard.

5. Promoting Awareness: Building a Culture of Winter Safety

While state employees have a responsibility to keep paths clear, individuals can significantly reduce their own risk of falling. Take the time to **educate staff** on these best practices:

- **Footwear:** Wear shoes or boots with good traction, like rubber or neoprene composite soles. **Avoid slick leather or plastic.**
- **Walk Like a Penguin:** Take short, slow, shuffling steps and keep your feet as flat as possible to maximize contact with the ground.
- **Keep Hands Free:** Avoid carrying heavy loads and keep your hands out of your pockets so you can use your arms for balance if you slip.
- **Be Aware:** Place your full attention on walking and watch out for uneven surfaces or unseen patches of black ice.
- By **proactive planning** and **communicating clearly**, staff can effectively mitigate risk, protect tenants and customers, and avoid costly legal disputes.