

For many organizations, commercial snow plowing is a big part of their business. Since snow plowing is seasonal, it is often performed by landscaping, construction, environmental or home repair contractors as a way to increase cash flow during the slower winter months. Private contractors may also see snow removal as a way to earn some extra money with minimal investment, especially if they already own a large truck. In order to increase the safety of the snow plow operator, the general public and private property, snow plow operators should follow safe plowing practices.

Advance Planning

Prior to the first snowfall, visit each area that will be plowed and develop a plan to clear the area quickly and safely. Check for obstacles such as bumper stops, speed bumps, curbs, sidewalk edges, shrubs, drains, fire hydrants and signs. Sketching a diagram with these items clearly identified will create a good reference for anyone who may plow the lot. In addition, many snow plow contractors retain backups in the event of illness or equipment failure. Having detailed notes and photos available for the backup will make the job run more smoothly.

After making some initial plans for the job, discuss with the customer where they would like the snow to be piled.

When making this determination, consider the following:

- **Streets and sidewalks**—Snow should never be piled on streets or sidewalks. Also, do not stack snow by the road where it might block the visibility of vehicles coming or leaving the lot. Never push snow across a road without first checking the local regulations. In many areas, it is illegal to push snow across a road.
- **Fire protection**—Never pile snow near fire hydrants or in designated fire lanes.
- **Customer entrances**—Keep snow piles away from customer entrance routes as much as possible. Never pile snow near handicapped parking spaces. Ideally, snow piles should be located on the far ends of the lot where minimal



pedestrian traffic would be expected.

- **Water drains**—During the day, the snow may begin to melt, and water will flow toward the drains. A blocked drain can cause water to puddle and re-freeze overnight into a dangerous patch of ice, so be sure to keep drains unobstructed by snow.
- **Property lines**—While the customer may not want any snow on his property, plowing it onto another property is not an acceptable practice.
- **Wind direction**—Plan an alternate snow pile location in the event of windy conditions. Always attempt to keep the snow pile downwind from the lot to reduce the chance of the snow blowing back onto the previously plowed area.

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Plowing Tips

Follow these tips during all commercial snow plowing operations:

- Always wear your seatbelt during plowing operations, and never stick your head out the window. Hidden obstructions can cause the vehicle to stop suddenly, resulting in personal injury.
- If a significant amount of snow is expected, get a head start by plowing during the storm rather than letting the snow accumulate. Plow during low-traffic times to minimize the number of cars and pedestrians in the lot.
- If you are responsible for the sidewalks, they should be cleared first. Push the snow from the sidewalk into the lot and use the plow to push it all away.
- When plowing close to a building, always push the snow away from the building. Another option is to drive up to the building with the blade in the straight position, drop the blade, and pull the snow back away from the wall.
- When moving in reverse, don't rely completely on the mirrors. Instead, turn around and look where you are going.
- Use extra caution when plowing next to curbs, vehicles and other obstructions. Never pile snow on a vehicle or building structure.
- Do not pile snow in the middle of a parking lot. The snow pile may freeze solid, making it almost impossible to remove later.
- Do not pile snow near mailboxes, dumpsters, water drains or electrical boxes.
- When plowing a dirt or gravel lot, lower the plow shoes. This will raise the blade so the surface is not scraped away.
- Push the snow banks back far enough to accommodate future snowfalls.

Additional Considerations

- Make your insurance agent aware of your snow plowing operations, even if it's only a small portion of your business income.
- Be prepared to provide certificates of insurance to your customers. Certificates of insurance document that you are covered by an auto and general liability policy.
- Check the local regulations for snow plow operators. Many jurisdictions require a permit to plow on commercial property.
- Defensive driver training and driver safety meetings are beneficial to all organizations. Plow operators are likely to encounter a number of hazards while driving between jobs, especially since much of the driving is done in poor travel conditions.

For Additional Information

EMC Safety Talks: www.emcins.com

- Winter Driving Tips
- Driving in Snow and Ice

EMC Tech Sheets: www.emcins.com

- Winter Driving