

SNOW START UP

ISSUE #3: FOCUS ON SAFETY

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SAFETY STARTS AT THE TOP

Snow and ice management companies are safety service providers. It is your job to provide services that enable safe passage on client sites. It's important, too, that the safety-first focus extends to the very people assigned to those sites — your team members.



Be a safety hero

Focusing on safety in a profession in which working for 20 hours straight is mistakenly touted as a badge of honor can be difficult. If you or your snow and ice team has a “safety is for wimps” mentality, your focus should turn to creating a better internal safety culture — and that starts at the top. Owners and managers must be the catalyst to ensuring that safety matters and isn't just a buzzword in your company.



Involve your team

While the focus on safety starts at the top, it is imperative that your team members have a voice and input in the creation of a safety program. Leadership must be engaged, but a safety culture thrives when there are ambassadors who deliver the messages and lead by example at every level of the company.



Be a risk worth taking

Adopting safety/loss control measures can make your company an above-average risk for an insurance company. But just putting together a safety manual and having some safety talks won't cut it in the long run. You must commit to training, implementing, monitoring, disciplining and constantly reviewing your program. Ask your agent to review your safety training program and offer suggestions on how you can lower your risk.



Safety drives efficiencies

A direct result of a strong safety culture is improved operational efficiencies. This is the case no matter the employees' position. When a safety-related incident occurs, the effects can ripple throughout the company and negatively impact all facets of the business. The inefficiencies are visible in many ways, since responding to and resolving an incident requires a great deal of resources, which can be reduced or eliminated with the proper culture and procedures in place.

SAFETY AS A WAY OF LIFE

Safety: “The condition of being protected from or unlikely to cause danger, risk, or injury.”

–WEBSTERS DICTIONARY

➔ No snow and ice management company seeks out danger, risk or injury. But too many times they find us when we are not working in a safe manner. Following are suggestions to keep danger, risk and injury at bay in your snow operations. This list may seem a bit daunting, but it really is easier than you think – and well worth the costs of implementing.

Establish a safety department

Set up or expand your dedicated safety department. It doesn't need to be complicated or expensive. Decide if it is going to be a position given to one of your existing team members, or if you are going to hire a new person. Either way, newer owners/managers shouldn't try to take on the job, since they likely are already wearing too many hats.

Set goals and measurables for the department. This person will need to know the expectations and how success for the department will be measured. The cost of this person will be quickly recouped when you start spending less on repairing damaged items and employees missing time from injuries.

Get to know your insurance company

Don't look at your insurance agent or carrier as “bad guys” that take our money and almost never give any of it back. They are not a necessary evil but a necessary partner.

Most insurance companies and agencies offer free safety training and seminars, and many will come to your facilities and conduct an OSHA-style inspection. This will help you get and stay compliant with OSHA standards, before you receive a visit from OSHA itself. Look for companies that give annual rebates for great safety scores and work with your insurance company. It will be a win for both parties.

Promote safety at all levels

Your people are your most important asset and your path to future growth and success. Do they know and believe in your company's safety culture? Are you doing all you can, even on a baseline level to keep them safe? Are you supplying them with correct PPE? Are there processes and procedures in place to keep them safe, and corrective actions when unsafe conditions arise?

You must also have procedures in place to maintain the safety and condition of your company's vehicles and equipment. Finally, are the jobsites that your teams work on safe

SAFETY AS A SALES TOOL

SAFETY SELLS! In today's more forward-thinking world, large companies are including a safety component in their RFPs, and insisting that their vendor-partners provide safety scores and OSHA forms. No longer will best price be the only guide. This is great news for any company that is working hard to have a strong safety culture. In many cases this will give you an advantage over your competition and may even limit how many companies you will be bidding against.

When you are looking for something to help separate your company from others and show the prospective client a value add, safety sells every time. These companies have strict safety procedures for their people and are looking for the same with whomever they hire.

and monitored for hazards?

It is very important to keep in mind that, in today's world, your people are going to be your best ambassadors and promoters. If they feel appreciated and safe, then they will be your best face forward when you hire new people and are developing employee retention initiatives.

Set up in-house safety committees

These committees can range from 2 to 10 people and should include representatives from all departments, not just operations.

Make sure goals and objectives are set, and that they are measurable for success. Give them broad access to all levels of safety checks. Vehicles, facilities, equipment and personnel should be on their lists of daily, weekly and monthly checks. Having personnel at all levels of your company involved in the safety process will help build your safety culture faster and stronger.

As often as possible, make safety fun, timely and, most importantly, make it a way of life, not an added expense.

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HEALTH & WELLNESS PLAY INTO SAFETY

Long shifts, late nights, cold weather ... not exactly the most ideal working conditions. But all of these are realities if you work in the snow and ice management industry. Implementing safety protocols to protect your team is essential to protect them from the following health concerns:



SLEEP DEPRIVATION. Snow & ice management professionals are prone to sleep deprivation when working long-duration storms. Sleeplessness slows your reflexes and reaction time, which can prevent you from identifying and stopping in times of danger. It is much like being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, so your mental and psychomotor skills diminish. Plus, lack of sleep can increase the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke and weight gain.

- Pre-storm planning should include a discussion with the team to rest/sleep prior to being called in for work.
- Factor short naps and breaks into your staff's production schedule to help keep your crew safer during long-storm events.
- Build a culture that makes team members comfortable to report fatigue to their supervisors.



SANITATION. During a storm, contractors may not have access to facilities to wash their hands, leaving them prone to spreading or catching colds or other illnesses.

- Make hand sanitizer or antibacterial wipes readily available to your crews to encourage their use when soap and water are not available.

- When possible, include a plan for bathroom access during long-duration events.
- Incorporate the use of antibacterial wipes as a part of the cleaning process for trucks and equipment. Wipe down steering wheels, plow and equipment controls, door handles and all other items in the cab that crews may touch.



DISTRACTED DRIVING. The increasing use of smartphones and other in-vehicle technology lends itself to convenience in our multi-tasking world; but it also opens up a dangerous and potentially fatal path. Don't allow employees to be distracted when operating equipment.

- Enact policies that prohibit texting and phone calls (even hands-free) when operating equipment.

- Ensure team members know to make equipment adjustments and read site maps before operations begin.
- A cool playlist can help pass the time; but restrict team members from blasting the radio or listening with headphones that can limit their ability to hear their surroundings.



NUTRITION AND HYDRATION. Stopping for meals may not be an option during a snow-storm, so many rely on fast food and energy drinks to keep going. Poor nutrition can lead to increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity and other long-term health issues.

- Plan time for your team to stop for short breaks to refresh, eat a healthy snack and stretch.
- Encourage your teams to drink plenty of water to help sustain energy. Discourage energy drinks, which can be harmful if consumed in excess.



IDENTIFY HAZARDS TO KEEP YOUR TEAM AND THE PUBLIC SAFE

COMMERCIAL SITES ARE FRAUGHT WITH POTENTIAL SLIP AND FALL AREAS. Since your teams are first responders, they're arriving at uncleared sites, leaving them open to potential accidents. Conducting risk assessments and comprehensive site engineering, and then properly training your teams to identify and safely manage these areas, can go a long way toward lessening the possibility of an employee or pedestrian falling on the site.



BLACK ICE. Black ice can occur in different spots, particularly when sites are subject to melt/refreeze conditions. Radiative cooling (when surface temperatures drop below the air temperature and surfaces emit heat into the colder upper atmosphere) is a leading cause of black ice. It can happen quickly, leaving unsuspecting pedestrians at risk.



RUNOFF. When conducting a risk assessment of a site, use an eagle eye to identify hazards that don't look ominous when it's not snowing but could cause big problems during the winter. Areas include drainage spouts, gutters, drains that flow directly onto the pavement, awnings, etc. Any of these could contribute to melt/refreeze, causing hazardous conditions.



STEPS/CURBS. Stepping on and off curbs and navigating steps is a prime area of concern. Crews should be properly trained to service these areas, and extra care should be given to the curb lines to prevent snow/ice buildup where pedestrians would step from the curb/steps into the parking lot/walkway.



WALKWAYS. Risks could include hidden depressions, the type of material (asphalt, concrete, pavers), black ice, snow and ice buildup, transitions from dry store entrances into the elements, etc.



PARKING AREAS. Shifting weight and balance can be an issue as people get into or out of their vehicles when snow and ice is present. The same is true for service providers entering or exiting their plow trucks or equipment. Always use three points of contact for stability.

KEY SAFETY RESOURCES

SIMA offers safety-related materials at my.sima.org. Download Tear and Teach training documents, Safety Quick Cards, checklists and more. Members have access to additional free courses, including Safety Boot Camp.

Visit www.sima.org/startup for all Snow Startup resources.



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