

Is Your Snow/Ice Management Contractor Ready for Winter?

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Being in the snow and ice management business for nearly 25 years, I've learned that preparation is key to success – a good snow fighting company must be prepared to battle the elements and service clients properly. I use the word “battle” because Mother Nature is a tough lady and when she decides to throw all she has at you and your accounts, you must be prepared to fight back.

Especially here in Northeastern Ohio where lake effect snow can not only last longer than expected but can also wreak more havoc than anticipated, here are four proactive items that are vital to a quality snow fighting company's ability to service clients.

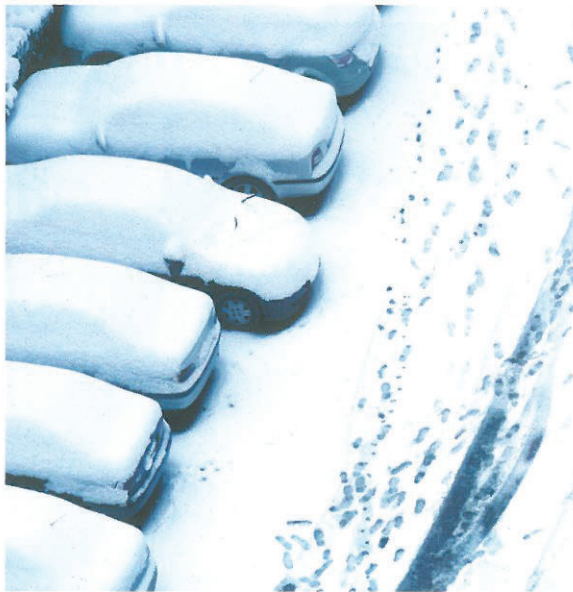
Post-season inspections

At H&M Snow Pros, we start to plan for our snow season in April. Some of you will say: April? By then the temperatures are rising, most of us have forgotten about the last snowfall and the snow season is hopefully at least six to seven months away. But that's when we begin going through all of our equipment to access the toll that Mother Nature has imposed throughout the previous months. We wash down all of our equipment with salt-neutralizing solution to try and prevent additional corrosion through the summer. We revisit our snow response plans to see where we were successful and where we failed. After we identify any shortcoming, we develop an action plan to better service clients the following season.

The reason why this time of year is so important is because we are only as good as our snow fighting equipment and the response plans that we develop. If you lose a truck, backhoe or loader to a breakdown, you'd better have plan B in place because the last time I checked Wal-Mart doesn't carry an articulating loader with a 16-foot pusher box that you can run through the self-checkout line at 3 a.m.!

Heavy equipment

After being in the business for this long, I have learned that no matter how new your trucks are and how shiny the plows look, the concrete curbs usually win and transmissions don't like wet heavy snow. How do we overcome this hurdle? We use larger equipment



with rubber cutting edges to help ensure our customers get the quality of service they deserve. Most loaders, backhoes and skidsters are designed and built to work hard with heavy gauge steel and hydraulic coolers to prevent equipment malfunction from overheating. What we have found is that our heavy equipment breakdowns are far and few in between, which keeps our team in the battle during the heat of the fight.

Blizzard planning

When a major snowstorm hits, snow and ice management companies call in the cavalry – our first responders. In my eyes, this is the most crucial demand of our service industry. I think most snow and ice management company in Northeast Ohio are capable of providing service when it snows two to four inches and ends at 4 a.m., but how about the 16- or 18-inch snowfall that was supposed to move through the area in 24 hours and decided to hang around for three days. In our industry, this is the type of challenge that separates the men from the boys. Our cavalry, for example, consists of a fleet of 20 salting units that do not have a scheduled route to plow. When Mother Nature tries to test our

resolve by throwing all she has at us, we stop salting and start plowing with these backup trucks. If our clients have fought through the elements, including bumper-to-bumper traffic and unplowed roads, to reach their office and service their customers, then I can provide them clean and safe passage from their car to the office.

Staffing and shifting

It is crucial that a good snow and ice management company utilize all resources properly to weather a prolonged event. A crew that is sleep deprived or cold and wet will not last the test of time and provide the proper level of service to a customer – let alone the myriad of safety issues that come along with sleep deprivation and operating equipment or driving a truck. Once our team determines that we are in for a long event, we implement our second-shift crews to relieve the first line of defense. This will ensure that our clients receive the proper level of service. This not only goes for our drivers, equipment operators and shovelers, but also our management and dispatch personnel. It keeps a fresh alert team in place at all times.

In summary, I believe that a good service provider is a lot like a seasoned NFL quarter back. Their job is to manage the many moving parts that come along with the snow and ice management of your property. Once the play is called, my job is not over; it's just beginning, even if that means I need to call an audible halfway through the snap count. When all is said and done, it's my job to make sure that all you see is the result you expect. **P**

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