



Garden News

Snow Services Edition

Inside this issue:

<i>Current Events</i>	1
<i>Did You Know? Email Updates</i>	2
<i>Contract Specifications</i>	3
<i>Frequency Weather Alerts</i>	4
<i>Storm Scenarios</i>	5
<i>Ice Melt Products Safety Zones</i>	6
<i>Snow Blowers vs. Shovels Snow Econ 101</i>	7

Now that we have had a few **snow storms, it's a good time** to review our snow removal services.

Like any industry, snow removal generates compliments and complaints. We have found that one good way to increase the former while decreasing the latter is to communicate and inform.

In this edition of Garden News, we will explore every

aspect of how we deliver snow removal services to our clients.



V-Plow wedging through

LOOK AHEAD For February

- Begin spring clean up
- Police for trash as weather allows
- Dormant season pruning as needed

For March

- Spring clean up
- Soil testing

Current Events

Snow removal is the hardest, craziest, most frustrating, most unpredictable, most-fill-in-the-blank-with-your-own-superlative part of our business. Sometimes we wonder why we bother to get out of our warm beds at 2:00 A.M., travel

treacherous roads, coax temperamental equipment, work for days with little or no rest, just so that we can shovel snow. Are we that crazy?

With over 30 years in the industry we have a lot of explaining to do.

Did You Know?



Snow removal costs can be equal to or more than lawn maintenance!

Average Snowfall

Snow removal costs are painful for many clients. Heavy snow and the associated costs for removal quickly deplete budgets.

We have developed a simple and accurate way for our clients to financially plan for snow removal services.

Basically, take a sample of historic costs for removing snow from one storm. The more samples, the more accurate your

estimate will be. Ten to twenty storms would be a good number. Create an average cost (separately) for each cleaning of sidewalks and each cleaning of streets.

Then, multiply the average cost for plowing streets by twelve and the average cost for shoveling walks by sixteen and you have your budget. Try to stick to your budget (setting aside **any unused funds**). **Don't get lulled into complacency** by a few dry years. Mother Nature will return with a vengeance.

E Mail Alerts

We maintain an e-mail program of frequent, sometimes hourly but at least twice daily, updates as to what our crews are doing, what our action plan is, and what we are expecting from the weather.

After a storm, we use the e-mail system to advise clients about snow storage, moving stranded cars, ice control, and other important subjects. Feedback has always been positive. So we decided to continue the program this season.

We would like to expand our email list to keep all interested parties, especially management and Board Members, instantly informed.

Please forward a copy of the Garden News to all interested parties, copy me on the e-mail, **and I'll do the rest.**

"We would like to expand our email list to keep all interested parties informed."

E Mail Updates



Keep current with email updates during the storm.

Contract Specifications

Your contract specifications can make or break your level of satisfaction and/or your budget. We offer a wide range of service levels to fit your needs. We will review two of the most popular specifications here.

It is most common for a client to request that sidewalks be cleared at any accumulation, and for streets and drives to be plowed at 2". With this level of service, you are less likely to experience ice build up and will not require the excessive use of damaging ice melt products on your sidewalks and messy sand/salt applications to your streets. The major drawback is the expense. This kind of service can cost 50% more than the next most common level: Sidewalks cleared at 2" and streets at 4". There is considerable cost savings at this level, but in our experience, we find that our clients will not tolerate this kind of service for long. Ice build up is

just too common.

There are hidden costs with this lower level of service. For example, if we receive two or three small storms in January and snow removal is not done, ice build up is the inevitable result and ice control becomes necessary. This means more site visits, labor, and materials costs. Chipping ice is very time consuming and therefore very expensive. In addition, come springtime you may be faced with replacing damaged concrete, dead grass and shrubs, and sweeping up all of that left-over traction sand. Of course, one must also consider the possibility of slip-and-fall accidents and the costs associated with them. In the end, when all factors are considered, our experience shows that the higher level of service leaves our clients happier and safer at little extra cost.



Cost vs. Service

"One must also consider the possibility of slip-and-fall accidents.... "



Choose the right options for you.

Frequency



How often to service your site?

Another important factor for controlling costs while providing necessary services is the frequency of service. Many municipalities require snow to be cleared within 24 hours of the end of the storm. This is not sufficient for the majority of our clients.

Our most typical service is to clear snow within eight hours of a specified accumulation, and then at twelve hour intervals for the duration of the storm.

We do provide for more frequent service for more sensitive sites. We also have some clients with less emergent needs that request removal according to the specifications of their municipality or their community. Of course, blizzard conditions change everything. When we experience large accumulations, we formulate a plan based on conditions.

"We count on NOAA."

Accurate weather information is vital for us to function. Over the years we have learned who to trust (and who not). Our rule #1 is never to listen to TV and radio news/weather. These people have a job to do...

No, not give accurate weather reports, but to entertain and sell advertising. In our opinion, this

means their accuracy suffers.

We count on NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). Hey, they are based right here in Boulder..

They have to know what's going on to get to work on time! Their web site is at www.noaa.gov.

The affiliated National Weather Service is also a great resource at www.weather.gov.

Want to know how much snow we actually got? Go to www.crh.noaa.gov/bou/?N=storm_archive

Weather alerts



The Perfect Storm

We will describe what we consider to be the perfect storm and what we believe to be the worst storm to illustrate the importance of timing.

Our perfect storm begins at 7:00 P.M., after everyone has safely driven home and are no longer walking on the sidewalks. It snows hard, an inch per hour until 11:00 P.M. We arrive on site shortly after to a pristine view with no vehicle traffic and

no snow snow-stomped sidewalks. We quickly and efficiently plow the roads into neat piles and clean the sidewalks right down to the concrete. We are done by 4:00 A.M. Our clients awake and at sunrise, peer out their windows to see a winter wonderland with perfectly cleaned streets and sidewalks. We take a short break for a nap and breakfast, then return to your site to clear parking spaces, check for ice, and do other detail work. Our clients return home with no worries.

The Worst Storm

Our nightmare storm sneaks in under the radar (not forecasted) and begins at 2:00 A.M. It snows a half-inch per hour for four hours and stops precisely at 6:00 A.M. when our clients awake and peer out the window. At 6:01 our phones begin ringing and we know that the complaints will not stop for the next 24 hours.

The weatherman now forecasts another inch of snow. Since we only have two inches on the ground, we have to decide: Do we wait for the last inch to fall, or do we plow now? Fact is, it makes no difference what we do. Remember, this is our nightmare storm.

We decide to start now. But since the storm was not forecasted, it takes us a little while to get people and machinery together. We hit the roads at 8:00 A.M. to find traffic at a standstill... Remember your last two-hour commute to work? That is us, all day long, sitting in traffic trying to get to your site. Our laborers are not particularly troubled by this unfortunate chain of events. They are sitting in our trucks making double-time listening to their i-pods.

They say that in every cloud there is a silver lining so we will imagine that a minor miracle happens and we do manage to get your site done by 4:00 P.M. But remember that last one-inch of snow? It decides to fall now. And with it comes 40 mph wind on the backside of the storm. Our clients return home at 5:30, precisely when the additional snow and the wind have conspired to obliterate any trace of us having every been on your site. Our phones begin ringing within renewed fervor and we know they will continue to ring all night.

The stress of idling in traffic all day has overheated one truck. The brakes have just failed in another. And the lights have gone out on our spare. Nightfall has arrived. Our laborers did not plan on working this long. They need to stop for food and a change of clothing. During the break, the snow blowers, hot from a long-day's work, **now freeze solid and refuse to start.**

We are back on the road by 6:00 P.M. and sit in traffic until 8:00. When we finally get to your site, the roads are icy and snow packed. Plows are useless. What snow blowers do start are ineffectual. The sidewalks are stomped down solid. We scrape at them with our plastic shovels, but it does little good. We spread some ice melt where we can and continue on. But progress is slow. Every so often our beleaguered foreman must stop and explain to another frustrated client why the sidewalks are not clean.

At 2:00 A.M. between fielding phone calls, working with temperamental equipment, and running a snow shovel, our foreman must once again stop work to deal with the maniac yelling from the second-story window that our shoveling is keeping him awake (**this really does happen... a lot**). **It does not help our foreman's condition to know that after a short break, he will be back chipping ice and spreading ice melt for the next two days.**

Five days later, the bill for the snow removal arrives in your office. Our phones will once again ring with a slew of icy calls. The client is (understandably) suggesting that we did not do a daytime cleaning because there is was no visual proof of it. In addition, no one is at all happy about paying for the overnight removal because it was so ineffectual. Lastly, the additional costs for ice melt and hand chipping seem extraordinary. The client is reasonably asking for a discount. Meanwhile paychecks are due to be cut and handed out today. The other phone line is ringing, it is the repair shop wanting paid. The mailman has already delivered the late notices from the bank, the gas station, and the insurance company. Just another day...

Ice Melt Products



Is ice melt safe?

Most of us in the company remember when “ice melt” meant “salt”, just plain old calcium chloride. In fact we still call whatever ice melt product we use by that convenient name, salt. But things are not so simple any more. There are many different products available utilizing many different materials, or combinations of materials. But the purpose is the same... To melt ice.

We all know that the old products did a lot of damage to sidewalks, turf, and plants. The newer products are better. But do not misunderstand, every label

says that the particular product **will not harm “properly cured”** concrete when used as specified on the label (in very light amounts).

In practice, ice melt products can still harm concrete and plants. As we discussed earlier, prevention is the key. If we can get the snow off the area before it turns to ice, we can use less product. In turn, there will be a lesser likelihood of damage to your property.

The best thing about the new products is that they work in colder temperatures. Where salt was ineffective at about ten degrees (no effect at zero), the newer products can work below zero.

Safety Zones

“Plows can side-slip without warning while pushing tons of snow.”

It is important to realize the steps we must go through to insure the safe removal of snow from your property.

Perhaps the least understood is the requirement for a margin of safety around our plows. Because they can side-slip without warning while pushing tons of snow, we cannot clean individual parking spaces.

There must be an eight-foot buffer on each side of the truck to safely punch snow forward in a parking space. That means, in general, we

have to have three spaces wide to clean out a full parking spot.

We use a different technique for cleaning along side buildings and garages, but we must still leave a safety zone. If needed, we can clean tight areas by hand or with a skid steer tractor.

Lastly, it is very helpful if we have designated snow storage areas.

We would be glad to inspect your site with you to determine and mark the best storage areas.

Snow blowers vs. Hand Shoveling

It seems simple, it is far better and far faster to use a snow blower rather than hand shovel. But decades in the field have taught us something very different. There are pros and cons to both methods.

The debate for snow blowers is well founded. Many people have used a machine in their own driveways and have had great experiences. But doing a single driveway is much different than counting on a machine to run for hours and days at a time.

The constant beating the machine takes while rattling across uneven sidewalks, jumping curbs, and loading onto and off of the back of a pickup takes its toll. When machines break down in the middle of the night, it is very difficult to keep on schedule.

We have also found that we need to own both single

stage and two-stage machines, for varying snow conditions.

Both types are useless in many snow storms. Cold weather is debilitating, warm weather creates slush that they can not handle. Most importantly, snow blowers do not scrape down to the concrete.

Snow shovels always do a neater, quieter job. But under most conditions, they are slower. While they do not break down mechanically, a laborer can only shovel so fast, for so long.

Our solution is to make use of all available resources. We employ a large contingent of shovelers, we have several snow blowers in addition to four-wheelers and skid steers.

Snow Econ 101

At the beginning of the newsletter, we suggested that we may be crazy for providing snow removal services. Perhaps we ARE crazy, but there are solid reasons for being in the business. First is because our clients need it. We are in the service industry and our philosophy is founded on just that, service.

However, like most things in life, there is an economic reason behind our decisions. We simply need to make use of **our equipment during the “winter” months: November, December, January, and February.** We also need the work to keep our people busy. These four months represent a third of the year. The math is brutally clear. If we did not utilize our labor and equipment during the winter, our summer cost of ownership would go up by 50%.

But the economics are not pretty. A new truck equipped to serve our needs costs over \$40,000.00. A plow is about \$4,000.00, a Bobcat Skid Steer around \$25,000.00, a trailer about \$4,000.00, a small snow blower about \$800.00, a large one \$2,500.00. Just a commercial snow shovel is \$25.00. We have to plow a lot of snow to pay this amount of overhead. As you are well aware, fuel prices are high and we use a lot of fuel. It costs over \$150.00 to fill one of our trucks and we can go through two tanks a day.

Labor costs are also rising faster than the overall inflation rate. In addition, we must pay double time to attract workers. We pay about \$10,000.00 per month in work comp and liability insurance. We fully realize that we end up passing these costs on to you, our client. You can be sure that we do everything we can to keep your property clean and safe at the lowest possible cost.

Economically speaking, there is a perfect system of supply and demand in place. Our laborers do not wish to be out in the cold at all hours of the day and night. They therefore do the best they can do get the job done as soon as they can in order to return to their warm and comfortable beds. I can tell you from years of experience, at 5:00 A.M. after shoveling all night, there is no stronger economic force than that of wishing to go to bed.

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Report Dangerous Conditions



As hard as we try, unfortunately weather conditions in Colorado sometimes lead to slippery surfaces. We do need your help in reporting them. We cannot be on your site every hour of the day (the cost would be overwhelming).

We typically have a crew or two circling the city for a few days after every storm. With a phone call from you, we can respond very quickly to complaints of ice build-up, perhaps a missed sidewalk, or other problem.