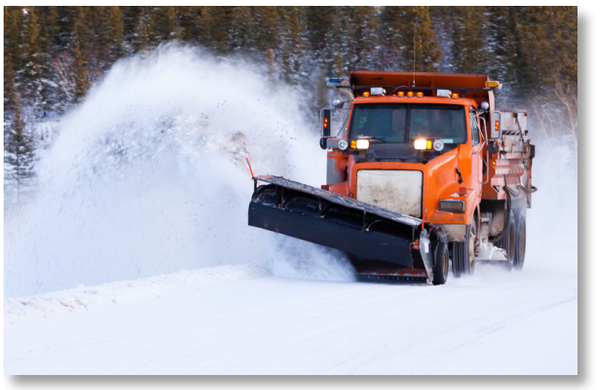
Snow Plow Safe Practices

PRIMEX³ RISK MANAGEMENT BULLETIN

Whether you're dispatching one truck for sanding purposes or deploying a full mobilization of staff for a prolonged snow event, managing the safety of your staff, the fleet, and the motoring public is always the first priority. Plow truck drivers are the first line of defense when fighting the snow on the roads.



Leveling the drifts for sleigh traffic was an early attempt to deal with snow in the streets. Ordinances in some cities required homeowners to clear their sidewalks of snow, but snow removal was not done on a citywide basis. And when the streets were cleared, it was often done by hired snow shovelers. As a result, wintertime travel in the early 1800's was still typically done on foot.

In the early 1900's motorization swept the country leading to motorized dump trucks and plows. With motorization and continued modernization of snow removal equipment and operations has come a host of new safety issues that remain today for public works agencies. Whether or not you're deploying only a few salt/sand trucks, or full mobilization of staff for a prolonged plowing event, managing safety is as important as choosing when to plow or when to apply salt.

Typical employee/driver injuries are:

- Slips and falls from ice covered equipment and iced parking lots and walkways
- Back injuries from moving plows and lifting heavy steel-cutting edges
- Entanglements in power take-offs and spinners
- Amputations from encounters with unforgiving heavy steel
- Head injuries when involved in vehicle crashes or sudden stops

All made worse by driver fatigue!

Employee Safety

Falls from icy equipment, back injuries from jockeying heavy snow plows, entanglement in power take-offs and spinners, head injuries from striking a windshield, and amputations from heavy cutting edges and steel chains are only some of the injuries snow plow operators commonly suffer when fighting snow. These problems are also magnified when these snow fighters are fighting sleep. Working long hours in tough conditions adds to injury potential when operators are all too commonly fatigued.

One strategy that can be helpful in preventing one of the more common injuries, a slip & fall on ice, is to make available footwear traction devices. One such device that has proven to be effective is YakTrax®. These lightweight, compact devices fit over all kinds of footwear and afford 360 degrees of traction.

Back injuries account for thousands of lost workdays every year. These long-lasting and painful injuries can be prevented by having your employees use heavy equipment to help lift the plows into place as well as having them work in well lit, flat and properly maintained areas will help your staff to avoid a lasting, painful back injury.

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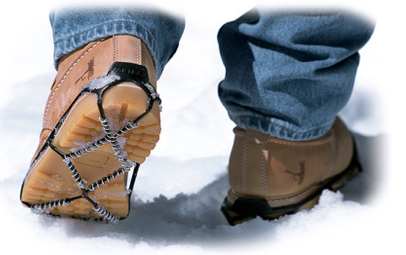
And, though it should go without saying — ***Wear Your Seatbelt!*** Countless injuries occur each year when plows strike hidden manhole covers, curb edges and yes, other vehicles. Buckle up, in the big rig, in the pick-up or certainly in the sidewalk tractor.

Injuries can be mitigated by:

- Wearing proper shoes along with footwear traction devices (see Yaktrax® sidebar)
- Using heavy equipment to assist lifting the plows in place and working in a well-lit, flat area (work smarter, not harder)
- Pay attention! Work carefully and deliberately. Don't always be in a rush
- ***Wear your seatbelt!*** Countless injuries occur when plow trucks strike hidden manhole covers, curb edges, and other inanimate objects hidden by the snow



"It doesn't take a genius to figure out that the risk of falling is greatest on winter ice. At a cost of less than $25 pair, YakTrax® may be one of the cheapest preventatives going."

Newsweek (October 10, 2015)

Vehicle Safety

Check your equipment ***before*** you need it. Always do a visual inspection of your equipment before you head onto the road. Get in the habit of cutting off all power to the truck and spreader. Also, check your equipment upon return to allow extra time to make repairs before the equipment is needed again.

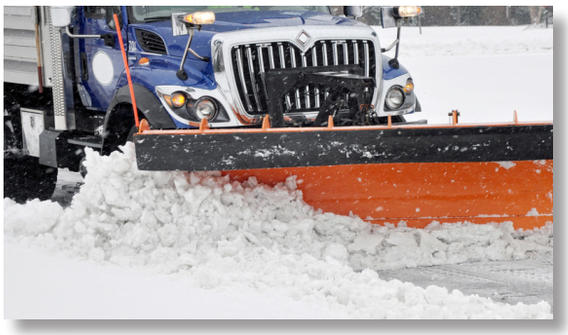
By far, the most common snow plow accident is a backing accident, and the cost of these accidents combined can be staggering. Preventing backing accidents isn't tough in theory. Simply put, backing accidents are the result of hitting something you didn't see, but should have. In practice, however, it takes better driving habits, perhaps a break from tradition or the use of technology to guide our way.

Consider the number of times a plow truck needs to back while plowing a route. Does the truck back often? Does it back in traffic? If the answers to these questions is "yes", then it perhaps makes sense to re-examine how the route is plowed, since reducing or eliminating backing can reduce or eliminating the number of times a vehicle has to back up to perform its function can reduce or eliminate the problem.

Have backing technologies been considered? Cameras, radar sensors and more can all be helpful in eliminating that big blind spot behind the plow truck, effectively improving the driver's chance of seeing what may be lurking off the back bumper that they may not otherwise see.

Driver Fatigue

Driver fatigue is often characterized by a diminished ability to work, loss of attention, slower reactions, poor response, deterioration of attention or alertness, and impaired judgment, none of which are good characteristics for an employee behind the wheel of a multi-ton snow plow in poor conditions. But we've all



heard the stories of drivers who, all too often, have been behind the wheel of a plow in a drawn out storm event for 20, 30 or even 40 hours.

Some municipalities have implemented policies that limit the time a driver can be behind the wheel. Absent that approach, agencies and their employees should do all they can to manage this exposure because trying to stay awake through the night as snow pounds against the windshield is very difficult.

What you can do to be better prepared for the next snow event:

- Get a good night's sleep the night before an anticipated storm.
- Come in off the road when you can't fight off the sleepiness!
- Take your time. Work carefully and deliberately.
- Take frequent breaks. Eat something nutritious, roll down the window for fresh air, get out and move around...a change of pace will feel good!
- Eat light protein foods such as chicken, turkey, fish, cooked beans and peas.
- And of course, avoid consuming alcohol before, during, and immediately after snow plow operations.

Watch Your Speed

It might seem like a good idea to try and get the job done faster, but it is not worth the injuries to your body, plow, or possible injuries to someone else. Don't drive faster than road conditions dictate.

Know the Route

Before it snows, drive/walk around the area you will be plowing to check for obstacles that will become hidden when snow is on the ground. Look for things such as bumper stops, speed bumps, curbs, sidewalk edges, shrubs, mailboxes, water drains, fire hydrants, fences, and pipes sticking up from the ground. To prevent damage to the area being plowed as well as to your snow plow and truck, mark obstructions that will be hard to see with snow cover.

Have a Plan

Due to the many variables and ever changing conditions in New Hampshire's weather, each storm and/or weather event may require a slightly different effort and/or emphasis on any number of maintenance tasks, which together, determine the overall winter maintenance, snow removal or ice control strategy. Developing and following a snow and ice control plan can ensure that the municipality delivers a timely, cost effective, and safe response to the storm. These efforts will allow you to better control and improve your operations thereby, improving employee safety, reducing damage to equipment, and minimizing potential lawsuits alleging roads are poorly maintained.

For more information, please contact your Primex³ Risk Management Consultant at 800-698-2364 or email *RiskManagement@nhprimex.org*.