

## The Exterior Management Cycle

*Scott Milnes*

### Prepare now for an unpredictable winter

Coming off a year that saw a very sporadic El Nino and unpredictable winter weather patterns, forecasters have been steadily keeping track of the incoming La Nina. While current models show it will be weaker than previous La Nina cycles, the unusually cold ocean temperatures along the equatorial Pacific will still cause unpredictable shifts in the average position of this winter's jet stream.

This is sure to cause some headaches for those who have yet to finalize their snow and ice removal plans. It is hard to predict what exterior services are going to be necessary, so it is vital to have an exterior service management company that is proactive, knows the ins and outs of your business, is familiar with the most used entrances and exits, and gets the preparation completed right and on time. This will set you apart from your competitors when the busy shopping season hits.

While proper snow removal and ice management goes a long way, it is important to recognize the domino effect that winter planning has on springtime landscaping, irrigation systems and parking lot maintenance. Much of the damage to irrigation systems, landscaping and parking lots comes from improper care during the winter months.

Let's walk through some key areas of facility maintenance and highlight ways to optimize your maintenance plans, reduce costs and increase access for your customers year-round.

### Parking Lot Care

A critical step, prior to the first big snowfall of the season, is to ensure your parking lot is free of cracks and potholes. Once potholes are patched and cracks have been filled, it's important to add a seal coat to protect the lot from Mother Nature and other unforeseen elements.

Why take these steps? Failure to do this in advance of snowfall allows rain and snow to seep into the existing cracks and potholes. Once temperatures reach freezing, the ice expands and pushes the dirt and gravel down, causing more holes, cracks and headaches for you and your customers down the line.

Making it through the winter months with minimal damage to the asphalt is ideal; preventive care minimizes parking lot maintenance for the following year. A good re-striping may be all you need to help customers park when the lines eventually fade.

### Winterize Your Exterior

No matter where in the country your facility is located, winterizing your properties is important for making sure plumbing and irrigation systems stay in working order.

Northern areas and places prone to freezing temperatures should ensure they are proactively avoiding damage. This includes checking that water supplies have been disabled, back-flow preventers are drained and tagged, valves have been drained and left partially open, sprinkler systems have been blown out to ensure all water is removed from pipes and sprinkler heads, and lastly, making sure the automatic controllers and power have been turned off.

Southern regions should also be doing their own version of winterization to protect the components of their irrigation systems that are exposed. This includes reducing watering times by adjusting the system controller, running the system every month to prevent dry cracks in the rubber parts, and inspecting the above-ground components every month and being prepared in case freezing conditions start heading south and the system needs to be drained.

### The Right Winter Management

Taking steps to ensure the least amount of damage to your facility also includes maintaining good curb appeal. The last thing you want is someone to arrive and park at your facility only to turn around and go home because they can't get inside due to all the ice and snow. When removing snow, plowing is still the most important response and is used in a majority of snow and ice removal strategies. Nothing beats the classic dump trucks with plows, rotary plows and front-end loaders.

De-icing is the reactive approach to handling snow and ice on the pavement. Using deicing chemicals can be harmful for your landscaping and parking lot maintenance as they first need to be applied to weaken the ice and pavement bond so that it can be removed mechanically. While effective, this can become time consuming and cause a great deal of harm to plants, grass and sidewalks along your facility, which ultimately hurts your curb appeal.

The preferred method is to stay ahead of the game, taking preventive action with anti-icing practices. Anti-icing forms a bond breaker between the pavement surface and snow and ice layers to help melt the snow quickly before ice can form. Anti-icing has been proven to be more cost effective and to reduce the amount of time required to restore roads and walkways to a clear and dry state.

### Completing the Cycle

When all these practices come together, you can rest easy knowing that in the spring your lush landscapes and walkways have been preserved and your parking lot is still in good condition. The benefits of having a year-round exterior service management company include the overall reduction of maintenance costs. Having a winter maintenance plan with the same company that will be taking care of your landscaping in the spring is very valuable. A team that knows what your exterior is supposed to look like throughout each season helps reduce materials used, improve efficiency, manage costs and more effortlessly retain curb appeal.

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