



## Facilitator — December/January 2011



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### Getting a Leg Up on Old Man Winter

Kevin Dent

Temperatures are plummeting, the snow is falling and your facilities are in dire need of attention. It's official: winter is here. By now, I hope most of you have begun to prepare for the harsh effects that are guaranteed to arrive in the coming months. If not, you may be scrambling to secure a plan for the most challenging of seasons.

Often, I advise facility managers to begin planning for winter in early summer. However, it is easy to forget about the pending wintry weather when we are enjoying the warm temperatures and focusing on drought issues.

#### Plan to Plan

Planning is the most important measure to ensure a successful winter season. Each year, we work with a variety of companies to implement a plan that is unique and specific to their needs. This is typical of an ESM team tasked to make sure all angles are covered before a catastrophic event occurs.

When confronted with bitter weather, you will want a clean and accessible site for both your customers and your employees. There are several factors to consider when making site preparations for the upcoming winter season. Identifying these factors and deciding upon a course of action is the first step in devising your plan. Snow and ice removal plans will need to be addressed early on, followed by the upkeep and appearance of the greenery and landscaping of your exteriors. Additionally, the tools that are used to achieve inviting facility locations must be decided upon.

During the drafting phase, it is important to follow each guideline, as they are vital to the preparation process. Recently, DENTCO drafted and implemented a seasonal plan for a long-time client, Einstein Bros. Bagels, the steps of which have been integrated into Einstein's overall plan to ensure a successful winter season. Consider how your facility also may benefit from these planning phases.

#### Prepare Your Clean List

A "clean list" refers to sites that are clearly identified as your facility's responsibility. By assuming this responsibility and sharing it with your ESM team, you will provide them with a clear understanding of the scope of work required, enabling them to better care for your locations.

#### Take Inventory of Your Exterior Assets

After completing your clean list, you will need to identify your property's exterior assets. When preparing this inventory, ask yourself, "What surrounding objects will require maintenance?"

Typically, an inventory of your exterior assets will consist of landscape, turf areas and sidewalks. Examples of exterior asset inventories include the lawn, fence lines and retaining walls, irrigation systems, parking lots, retention ponds, walkways and dumpsters.

After each item has been properly documented, you will want to take photographs and jot down a brief description of each asset, outlining any unique or special needs. This will be vital during the winter season. When storms hit, ground visibility becomes a huge concern, and it is difficult to assess an area that cannot be clearly viewed. A detailed list will significantly increase your efficiency when bad weather approaches your area.

## Developing a Snow and Ice Removal Plan

Once you have prepared your clean list and have inventoried your locations, you are ready to focus on the implementation of a snow and ice removal plan. Again, this step should be completed by the end of summer to ensure each facility is prepared with the proper tools and equipment to clean up your locations when faced with a vicious snow or ice storm.

Timeliness is key when developing a snow and ice removal plan for your facilities. The earlier you can advise your ESM team of the locations requiring snow and ice removal, the better prepared the team will be. Professional snow removal requires logistical planning to ensure proper equipment and supplies are staged in the correct locations at the correct time.

The next step in the planning process is to inform your ESM team of any unique specifications that your facilities may require. For example, there may be areas that need calcium treatments and others that necessitate sodium-based products. Do you wish to have liquid pretreatment products applied? These types of factors need to be clearly identified prior to the winter season.

Once the specifications have been identified, you will want to assess the safety requirements for your locations. Survey your facility to determine potential slip-and-fall areas that will be affected by snow and ice. Are there any steps, sidewalks or common areas that are frequently used? If so, you'll want to treat these areas first.

Following discussion of the planning process, there are a few elements that can be addressed days or weeks prior to snow and ice removal needs. By tracking weather conditions, surveying sites and taking preventative measures to ensure safety requirements are met, your facilities will be more than prepared when snow and ice hit the area. Although it may seem like common sense to survey your existing sites to prepare for snow and ice removal, this step is often overlooked. Through site surveying and staking, you can be prepared to tackle any issues as soon as they arise, rather than dealing with last-minute surprises.

## Care for Your Surroundings

Now that you have taken preventative measures to ensure your facilities are safe, focus on the appearance of your property's exteriors. A few weeks prior to the cold season, there are several things that can be done to winterize your facilities, including protecting and fertilizing planting beds and trees, trimming and grooming ornamental grasses and shutting down all irrigation systems.

In late fall, mulch planting beds to help protect them during the winter. Not only will the mulch preserve moisture to the plants, it also will serve as a blanket to prevent shock. Fertilization of trees and shrubs during this time period also will encourage root development and growth.

Prior to winter, you will want to cut back your ornamental grasses and perennials. Trimming them at the base will greatly reduce the amount of shock the plant will endure during the winter. Just like grass, the plant will grow back in the spring with a rejuvenated look.

In cold climates, shut down your irrigation systems to prevent them from freezing. It is best to have a professional ESM company perform this task. If not done properly, errors may occur and pipes may retain water, resulting in very costly damage. A professional will have an adequately sized air compressor to ensure a complete job of evacuating your irrigation lines zone by zone.

## Looking Ahead

Remember, preparation is key. Through planning, your facilities will be more inviting during bad weather and you will feel confident about the service and safety that you are providing to your customers.

After the planning phase, remember to be aware of your surroundings and the variables that may affect your facility. Safety is No. 1, followed by the upkeep and appearance of your facilities. It's not an easy process, but it is a necessity that will ensure a successful winter season.

Upon reviewing these recommendations, you may wish to consider these elements and assess whether your facilities can benefit from an ESM provider. Logistically and economically, it may just work in your favor.

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