

SNOWMAGEDDON PART II

Are you ready?

By Debbi Sellers

Earlier this year our state saw some of the coldest temperatures ever recorded in the month of February. There were also significant, wide-spread snowstorms with strong winds that left most of Western Washington under record-breaking snow accumulations of anywhere from several inches to more than two feet. In addition to the snow fall, communities were dealing with high winds, fallen trees, power outages, frozen roads and too many school closures to count.

Members reported difficulties keeping roads plowed under these record-breaking cold temperatures and high quantities of snowfall. Members endured constant breakdowns of their snow removal equipment and a lack of trained drivers as plowing operations were running 24 hours a day. In addition, Members had limited amounts of sand and de-icer available for use, which further complicated efforts to keep the roadways as clear as possible.

As we head into the winter months, now is the time for Members to review policies and procedures addressing snow and ice removal. Members have a duty to exercise ordinary care to maintain public roadways in a reasonably safe condition for ordinary travel. Having a snow and ice removal policy is essential to improve public safety, the flow of traffic and reduce the risk of liability arising out of snow and ice storms. WCIA recommends snow and ice removal policies include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Establish procedures for plowing, sanding and de-icing of public roads.
2. Determine and publish priority routes (first, second and third priority) for ice and snow removal.
3. Create procedures for the treatment of ice and removal of snow at Member facilities kept open and used by the public during winter weather conditions. This should include the inspection, removal or treatment of walkways, sidewalks and parking lots with the goal of making these areas reasonably safe for use. If Members don't have the resources to address and remove the hazardous conditions, signs should be posted, warning of the dangers or the facilities should be closed.
4. Establish procedures for the inspection and removal of wet and/or heavy snow accumulation from roofs of Member buildings/garages where collapse could endanger the public and/or employees.
5. Create procedures for the mobilization of road crews based upon the severity of a snow and ice event. This should include an outline of the Public Works' chain of command that fits within the Member's individual organization.
6. Establish protocols and arrangements with local towing companies to remove and store abandoned or stalled vehicles that impede or threaten the safe use of public roads.

In conjunction with the snow and ice removal policy, now is the time for Members to complete a comprehensive inspection of all snow and ice removal equipment and make any needed repairs. Ongoing inspections should be completed on a routine basis throughout the winter to ensure everything remains in good working order.

Finally, Members should review procedures for use of its social media accounts and/or websites to notify citizens about road conditions, sanding and plowing priority routes, road closures, power outages and any other storm related conditions. Responsibility for posting information on the Member's social media sites should be established, giving a limited number of staff access to post information on behalf of the Member.

For more information on snow and ice removal, please see WCIA's Liability Resource Manual guideline, PWK.11 Snow and Ice Removal and the related samples PWK.11.01 Sample Snow and Ice Removal Policy and PWK.11.02 Sample Snow and Ice Vehicle Inspection Checklist. The Liability Resource Manual is available through the Member Resources page on the WCIA website: <https://www.wciapool.org/member-resources>. If you have questions or would like to discuss the potential risks related to snow and ice removal, please contact your assigned WCIA Risk Management Representative.