



SNOWPLOW SAFETY/WINTER OPERATIONS

While most people are relaxing at home during a winter snowstorm, municipal snowplow operators take to the roads to clear snow and ice to ensure essential operations such as public safety, as well as public motorists, can travel our communities safely.

Even though we cannot control the weather or other drivers, we can control our internal operations as well as the condition of our vehicles and our driving habits. The following tips will help your organization accomplish the goal of clearing roadways while reducing the risk of a snowplow incident.

- Plow operators cannot be allowed to “learn as they go.” Statistics have shown that snowplow-related accidents involve both new and experienced drivers. All experienced drivers should receive refresher training each year before winter snowplow season begins. Before the first storm, have plow operators drive and inspect your plow route to familiarize yourself with narrow roads, guardrail locations, blind spots, raised manholes or storm drains, protruding curbing, rock walls, mailboxes, signs, raised or loose pavement, holes, tree limbs, etc. These should be removed, repaired, or flagged. Create obstacle courses with cones, barrels, and other obstacles to challenge plow operators fine skill motor controls in a controlled environment.
- Determine emergency shift rotations and schedules to ensure plow operators do not work excessive hours without a rest period. Drowsy driving is dangerous because sleep deprivation can have similar effects on the body as drinking alcohol. Being awake for 18 hours straight is comparable to driving with a .05 percent blood alcohol content.
- Inspect your vehicle and equipment before you begin and periodically as needed throughout plowing operations. Check tires, fluid levels, lights, brakes and chains, plows and wings, spreaders, etc. Also make sure the vehicle frame and body are free of sand and rocks that might cause damage to following vehicles. It is recommended you document the pre-trip inspection.
- Plow operators must dress for the conditions they expect to encounter. Ensure they have extra layers of clothes and spare gloves and socks.
- Plow operators must wear a class 3 high visibility safety vest outside of their winter wear during low visibility conditions whenever there is any potential for struck by vehicle hazards. To include when operators exit their plows on public roadways or parking lots as well as base locations such as public works where frequent plow and heavy equipment traffic and equipment swaps occurs.
- Always wear your seatbelt when in a moving vehicle or piece of equipment.
- Maintain communications with plow operators: Keep in contact with base and if appropriate, the local police and/or fire department.
- Stop periodically to clear ice and snow completely from windows and from headlights, backlights, and warning lights.

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- Follow defensive driving practices. Increase your following distance behind other vehicles. Allow tailgaters to safely pass you. Adjust your driving according to road conditions, traffic, visibility, terrain, and other factors.
- Allow for extra stopping distances on ice and snow. Be especially cautious when entering intersections.
- Avoid unnecessary backing. Back up only when there is no other way to get the job done and the plow operator must visually ensure the area is clear before backing. Ensure the audible backup alarm is properly working.