



Safe Winter Weather Work Practices

When it comes to slip and fall prevention, salting and shoveling are key areas to pay attention to in any climate — even down South! As you get ready to complete these tasks, United Heartland wants you to think about doing so safely in order to prevent injuries. With this in mind, we encourage you to remember the following tips when completing salting, snow removal and other winter-weather activities:

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Plan Ahead

Before you begin removing snow and spreading salt, it's critical to make preparations that'll help you avoid slip and fall injuries. Here are some common sense things to consider:

- If you notice your parking lot, sidewalks, building entrance or any area where an employee or customer needs to walk is slippery, tell someone right away.
- Spread salt and ice-melting compounds safely, taking small steps — essentially walking like a penguin.
- Wear slip-resistant footwear and good boots. There are many companies who manufacture slip-on snow cleats and shoe coverings, such as YakTrax® <http://www.yaktrax.com/>. These cleats grip the ice and help reduce falls on snow and ice — but you still have to be very cautious when wearing them.
- Entering buildings has its hazards as well. Wet shoes on wood or tile floors can make for a very slippery combination. It's helpful to have a mat right inside the doorway on a wood or tile floor so you can take your shoes off.
- Be careful when salting or removing snow at night. There could be hidden dangers, such as snow-covered ice or black ice.



Don't Overexert Yourself

Shoveling heavy and wet snow can be a challenge. We hear stories on the news each winter about those who have died or been seriously injured due to shoveling activities and overexertion.

If you have to shovel, do so at a comfortable pace and only handle what you physically feel comfortable with. Be sure to use the right tools for the job as well — there are many types of shovels that are ergonomically designed to provide assistance. The majority of these shovels have bent handles to make snow handling easier.

How many pounds you lift when you shovel will depend on the type, depth, and water content of the snow and the amount of space you have to clear.

- Light, fluffy snow might weigh as little as five pounds per cubic foot.
- Compacted snow can weigh 20 pounds per cubic foot.
- Heavy, wet snow can weigh even more and feel like you're shoveling wet cement.
- There are other numerous variables in snow weight, but to give you an idea, an average cubic foot of snow weighs about eight to 10 pounds, so if you have 3 cubic feet of snow on the shovel, that's like tossing up to 30 pounds. It may not seem like a lot right now, but after many shovels full, it adds up.

Snow shoveling requires you to lift a lot of weight in a short span of time and puts a lot of stress on your back and body. In fact, shoveling snow can be just like undertaking a tough workout, so you should stretch and warm up before you shovel snow. Key things to remember include:

- Do stretches of the lower back, arms, legs, hamstrings and shoulder muscles.
- When you shovel, keep your back straight and bend your knees.
- Keep your knees shoulder-width apart.
- Lift with the legs and not your back.
- It's best if you don't twist and throw the snow — if possible try and place the snow where you want it or throw it forward.
- Space your hands apart; this will give you better leverage lifting the snow.
- Twisting while holding the weight of the snow can hurt your back. If you want to throw the snow, don't load up the shovel. Take smaller scoops of snow and be sure to take breaks and catch your breath occasionally.
- If you feel any kind of pain, stop shoveling.

Salting

Each bag of salt can weight a lot. The majority of commercially-purchased bags of salt commonly weigh 40 to 50 pounds. These bags are usually made of plastics, they are hard to handle due to the shifting salt inside and sometimes they come with too small of a handle at the top to safely move them. Be sure to practice safe lifting techniques when handling any bag of salt. Ideally, you want to dump the contents of the salt into a portable spreader to easily wheel the salt and disperse where needed. There are many types of spreaders and even ones that fit onto the back of pick-ups and other snow removal equipment. Get the one that is right for the job.

General Cold Weather Safety Tips

Lacerations occur during winter, often due to skin becoming dry as the cold air robs the moisture from our bodies. If you are doing any cutting, trimming or opening salt bags, do so with caution and wear proper gloves. Never cut items toward your body. If you use a knife or scissors to cut, make sure it's sharp.

Wear proper clothing to keep warm and prevent frostbite. Cold weather professionals always tell you to dress in layers. If you show any signs of frostbite or hypothermia, including redness, numbing or swelling of the extremities, confusion, or slurred speech, immediately go inside and seek medical help.

The Tools for the Job

What you use for the job is as important as how you do it.

- Get good shovels. If they are damaged, discard and obtain new ones. A lightweight shovel will weigh less than an old metal one.
- The shovel should be about chest high. If the shovel is too short, you end up bending too much. If the shovel is too long, it causes the snow to actually weigh more and the lifting be that much harder, not only hurting your back, but also your wrist and forearms.

If your company is fortunate enough to have a snow blower to do the sidewalks and other exterior walking surfaces that's great, but you're still not free of injury.

- Ensure that anyone using the blower understands and reads the operation manual.
- There are many hazards you might not think of when it comes to snow blowers, including exposure to carbon monoxide, strains from pushing/pulling and getting caught in moving parts.

The list of things to make sure you do when it comes to snow blowing is important:

- Operate with good visibility.
- Wear proper outer gear to prevent frostbite and good footwear to eliminate slip and falls.
- Wear adequate safety gear, including safety glasses with side shields, appropriate hearing protection and protective gloves.
- Avoid wearing loose clothing, scarves or jewelry that could get caught in moving parts.
- If the blower clogs, completely turn off the power. Never stick body parts in the auger to remove jams. Ideally, take it into someplace warm to let the snow melt and then remove the clog. Many blowers come equipped with a small shovel/pick to remove clogged items.
- Keep others away from the discharge end of the blower so they don't get injured by flying debris. If you have to use the blower on gravel, adjust the runner so the scraper blade doesn't contact the loose stones and make them projectiles.
- If you operate on a grade/slope, do so at slower speeds so you can control the blower.
- Gasoline is extremely flammable, so handle with care, clean up spills and don't smoke when re-fueling your blower.
- Stay alert for unexpected hazards and look in the direction you're traveling.

