



Snow

Removal Info



Background: The last two winters have brought us record snowfalls over prolonged periods. These snows impacted the City of Spokane and its citizens, limiting the ability to get around the community safely. Citizens requested changes, and the City is responding.

The City is rolling out a revised approach to snow removal as a pilot project for the 2009-10 snow season. Citizens will be encouraged to offer comments and suggestions throughout the winter so we can revise the approach and come up with a final plan for the 2010-11 snow season.

The City's revised approach is designed to:

- Improve safety for motorists and pedestrians.
- Ensure emergency responders can reach citizens.
- Enhance movement for pedestrians, motorists, and economic activity.

The approach will require the City and citizens to work together.

- The City is committing to more plows, enhanced snow removal efforts, and greater communications with citizens. We'll also make a serious push to clear sidewalks around City-owned properties.
- Citizens and business owners will need to follow parking restrictions and commit to keeping sidewalks clear. Clearing off vehicles, hydrants, and storm drains also will be important.

Below, please find a series of frequently asked questions to get you all the details about the proposed changes to our snow removal plans.

When is the "Snow Season?"

The City has defined the snow season as running from Nov. 15 to March 15. Spokane sees most of its snowfall during these four months of the year, with snow often concentrated in December and January.

What is a "Snow Emergency?"

During Snow Season, the City monitors weather conditions 24 hours a day. When snowfall reaches certain thresholds, the City will declare a snow emergency, which triggers a variety of responsibilities for the City and its citizens. We have two stages of snow emergency, depending on conditions.

What's included in a Stage 1 Snow Emergency?

The City will declare a Stage 1 Snow Emergency when 2 inches of snow are on the ground and 4 more are anticipated during the current snow event. This declaration will trigger a number of actions.

Frequently Asked Questions

The City will:

- Notify citizens of the snow emergency.
- Plow arterials and fixed STA bus routes on a 20-hour schedule until complete.
- Supplement Street crews with crews from other City departments, as needed.
- Plow Neighborhood Business Districts to the curb, as part of the arterial routes.
- Plow around hospitals and in medical district, as needed.
- Clear snow in Central Business District using de-icer or by plowing to the center of the street.
- Monitor residential hills for possible action.
- Clear sidewalks around priority City-owned property within 24 hours.

Citizens, meanwhile, will be asked to:

- Move parked cars off all arterials and fixed STA bus routes within 6 hours.
- Clear sidewalks of snow within 24 hours.

What's included in a Stage 2 Snow Emergency?

The City will declare a Stage 2 Snow Emergency when 6 inches of snow are on the ground and more is anticipated during the current snow event. Again, this declaration will trigger a number of actions.

The City will:

- Notify citizens of changing snow emergency.
- Immediately embark on a full-City plow. A full City plow will take about 4 days of 24-hour operation, depending on weather conditions.
- Bring in private contractors to supplement City crews.
- Clear sidewalks around City-owned property within 24 hours.
- Be ready to implement "Snow Corridor Plan," if weather conditions severely restrict the City's ability to keep up with snowfall.

Citizens, meanwhile, will be asked to:

- Keep parked cars off of all arterials and fixed STA bus routes.
- Move vehicles out of downtown street parking spaces between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m.
- Move parked cars in residential areas to one side of the street within 12 hours. (Odd side of the street during odd snow seasons—2009-10; even side of the street during even seasons—2010-11)
- Clear sidewalks of snow within 24 hours.
- Clear vehicles that are parked along the street of snow.
- Clear snow from around fire hydrants, storm drains, and mail boxes.

What's the Snow Corridor Plan?

The Snow Corridor Plan is implemented when City crews cannot effectively keep arterials clear because of weather conditions. Crews will concentrate on identified routes that citizens can rely on until conditions improve. New signage is being added to the snow corridor routes. The routes include:

North-south

- Maple/Ash. I-90 to the north City limits.
- Cedar/High Drive/Hatch. I-90 to 57th Avenue.
- Division Street. I-90 to the north City limits
- Bernard/Grand. Third Avenue to High Drive.
- Freya/Greene/Market. I-90 to the north City limits.
- Freya/Thor/Ray/Regal. I-90 to 57th Avenue.

East-west

- Francis Avenue. West City limits on Nine Mile Road to Havana Street.
- Wellesley Avenue. Assembly Street to Freya Street.
- Sunset Highway/Second and Third Avenues. West City limits to east City limits.
- 29th Avenue. Cedar Street to Havana Street.
- 37th Avenue. Bernard Street to the east City limits.

Why do we need to restrict parking during snow emergencies?

Restricting parking during snow emergencies allows plow drivers to clear away more snow, widening the area available for cars, trucks and buses and generally improving drivability for motorists. In the downtown, parking restrictions also allow the City to clear snow from parking spaces, allowing for easier parking for customers. In residential areas, limiting parking to one side of the street allows plow drivers to move away from the curb, reducing the amount of snow and ice that ends up on sidewalks. Once the snow emergency is over, parking restrictions are lifted.

What happens in neighborhoods with little off-street parking?

The Street Department suggests that Neighborhood Councils work to identify locations with parking lots that would be willing to provide parking until plows work through the residential areas.

What about abandoned cars along City streets?

Before the snow season, the City intends to conduct an emphasis to remove abandoned vehicles from the streets to avoid problems when plowing efforts get under way later in the year.

Why is it important to keep sidewalks clear?

Sidewalks are an important mode of travel for many of Spokane's citizens. Our children use them to get to school and to their bus stops. Many people use them to reach Spokane Transit Authority stops and to get basic supplies at grocery stores and other locations.

Icy and snow-packed sidewalks are dangerous and often leave people to walk to their destinations in the street—another unsafe choice.

What is the City doing to help keep snow off of sidewalks?

Plowing pushes snow onto sidewalks, especially in areas where there are no planting strips next to the curb. However, with parking proposed for just one side of the street during plowing in the residential areas, City plow drivers will be able to plow away from the curb somewhat, reducing the amount of snow that will end up on sidewalks. The Street Department also recommends maintaining a berm next to the street when shoveling to help prevent snow from additional plows ending up in the sidewalk. Another great tip—shovel to the right side of your driveway when you're looking at the street. That prevents the plows from pushing the snow you just shoveled back into your driveway.

How are citizens notified of snow emergencies?

The City of Spokane will use a variety of methods to notify citizens when a snow emergency is declared. Notices will be sent to all local media, posted to the City's web site at www.spokanecity.org, added to CityCable 5 scrolling text information, sent through neighborhood email distribution networks, and added to electronic street signage, when possible.

Citizens can sign up for electronic updates from the City by creating an account at www.spokanecity.org and asking for news updates or by following us on Twitter, <http://twitter.com/SpokaneCity>. They may also call the City's snow plow hotline at 456-2666 to find out when plows will be in their neighborhood or watch for updates on-line at www.spokanecity.org.

Why are we rolling out these changes as a pilot program?

The City's goal is to create a plan that works the best for the majority of citizens. It's difficult to know how well these ideas will work until we try them and hear from our citizens.

How can I provide input?

Citizens may send an email to snow@spokanecity.org or call 755-CITY. They also can watch for opportunities at the City Council when these issues will be discussed.

What will happen during future years?

The City will evaluate its experiences and those of our citizens during this pilot project year. We'll refine our plans and perhaps seek legislative changes through the City Council. Eventually, we will likely add penalties for failing to comply with things like parking restrictions and sidewalks clearing. We may eventually tow cars.

What are normal winter operations at the City?

During the snow season, the City changes its street operations to accommodate the ice and snow of Inland Northwest winters. Street crews switch to 10-hour shifts, covering 20-hours a day, 7 days a week. Weather is monitored continuously for changing conditions. Crews plow snow, spread de-icer, and perform related tasks to improve driving conditions and keep citizens safe.

How does the City prepare for winter operations?

Each fall, the City tunes up the truck plows, graders, de-icers, and sanders in preparation for winter weather. We attach the plow blades to our trucks, make sure we have ready supplies of de-icer and sand, and ensure that contracts are in place with private contractors who can supplement our plow crews when needed. We step up monitoring of winter weather and are prepared to change our shifts. This year, we also bought 11 new truck plows and are creating new signage to assist our citizens.

What are expectations of citizens during the snow season outside of emergencies?

Citizens are asked to keep their sidewalks clear of snow and ice every time snow accumulates to 2 inches. It's about being a good neighbor. By City ordinance, adjacent property owners are responsible for keeping the sidewalks clear and safe, and liability issues rest with the adjacent property owner, not the City.

What can I do to prepare in advance for snow season?

In advance of the snow season, citizens can make sure they have adequate snow shovels or a working snow blower. They may want to consider buying some salt or sand. They should also figure out where they can park when a snow emergency is called. Make sure you know who in your neighborhood might need help with shoveling or other winter work and offer to help.

And, as always, watch for information when it snows.

Send input/comments to: snow@spokanecity.org.