A technical reference bulletin by the Risk Control Services Department of the Glatfelter Insurance Group

Glatfelter Public Practice℠
A Division of Glatfelter Insurance Group

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Snow Removal Policy for Schools

Once a school district has made the decision that the school facilities will be open during inclement weather, it is imperative that the vehicle and pedestrian areas on the school property are cleared of ice and snow to reduce the potential for slips, falls and vehicle accidents. This requires both flexibility and planning to make sure adequate resources are available prior to the arrival of students, staff, and visitors. The following are some risk management considerations for school districts that are subject to snow storms.

Contractor vs. In-house Staff

Many school districts use a combination of subcontractors and in-house staff to provide the equipment and people necessary to clear the roads, parking areas, and walking paths. The most common scenario is for the subcontractor to plow the large parking areas while the custodial staff and buildings and grounds crew clear the walking areas. In selecting a subcontractor, the district should make sure that the contractor has adequate resources to respond on a timely basis. The district should be a priority client that receives the first (and sometimes repeated) efforts by the contractor to keep the areas clear. Some contracts contain terms that define who is responsible for requesting/authorizing the snow removal expenditure, who is responsible for accepting the request from the district, the estimated removal costs (fee schedule) based on the amount of snow removed, and response times expected.

School District Policy

The school district should have a written policy that states the district will endeavor to remove snow and ice as reasonably as possible depending on particular conditions at the time. There are many variables that impact the ability of the district to remove and maintain the areas surrounding the school including timing of the storm, temperatures, wind, drifting snow, sun, shaded areas, etc. The policy should also address the following areas:

Responsibilities

For each school and administrative building, the roles and responsibilities of the custodial and buildings and grounds staff should be defined. A written procedure should establish who and how they will attempt to reasonably remove snow and ice from sidewalks and parking lots. The procedure would define who is responsible for removing the snow from various areas such as custodians being responsible for most sidewalks adjacent to their building and maintenance responsible for removal in parking lots and outlying sidewalks. Administrative buildings may not have a day time custodian so special arrangements should be defined for such buildings. The duties of snow removal should be included in an employee's job description, so there is not confusion about who is expected to perform the work.

Priority Areas

Based on the flow of traffic and visitors to a school, the policy should clearly identify which schools and which areas at each school should be cleared first. The primary consideration is for the safety of drivers, buses, and pedestrians who are accessing the main entrances to the buildings. Typically the schools that open the earliest are a high priority. Other considerations are the enrollment size, special needs access, planned special events, and the topography of the site and drainage of the specific facilities.

This is a sample guideline furnished to you by Glatfelter Public Practice. Your organization should review it and make the necessary modifications to meet the needs of your organization. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing risk exposure to the public, personnel and property. For additional information on this topic, you may contact your GPP Risk Control Representative. www.glatfelterpublicpractice.com

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Equipment

The procedure should discuss the types of equipment that is available and expected to be used. The staff positions responsible for maintaining and using the specific equipment should be identified. Ice melt should be positioned in areas of high traffic and similarly, it should be defined when and where they will regularly use ice melt.

Planning

Weather forecasts and district communications are important to assure the proper staff and equipment is available in advance of the storm. Flexibility in work schedules and the ability to approve overtime is important to assure that maximum staff effort is available in advance of, during, and after a snow storm.

Documentation

Finally, documentation of snow and ice removal efforts is important. Personnel would document the time of each snow removal and placement of ice melt. If a district can show they have a procedure in place, personnel assigned the responsibility, adequate equipment and subcontractor support and then document that they are following the procedure, this provides some defense in the event of a claim such as a slip or fall on school property.

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