

Snow Removal Best Practices for Before, During and After the Season



SNOW REMOVAL BEST PRACTICES FOR BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE SEASON

Experienced commercial facility managers understand the value of a well-planned snow and ice removal program. Working with a trusted provider can help ensure your properties are maintained and remain open and that your employees and customers stay safe this winter.

An effective snow and ice program must be attended to at every stage, but your success hinges on the actions you take before the season ever starts, and then maintaining vigilance during the season and evaluating efforts once winter passes. This guide will help ensure your program is reliable and predictable—even if the weather isn't.

Before Snow Season Begins

The majority of your work for the snow and ice removal program will be completed during this planning and prep phase. From establishing your timeline and avoiding common missteps to understanding pricing models, choosing the right partner and beyond, these tips will help you get your snow removal program off to the best possible start.

The Ideal Snow Removal Timeline

To ensure your program's success, your snow and ice removal request for proposal (RFP) should be completed not just before the first snow falls, but well before the first fall leaf hits the ground. Early to mid-summer—typically between June and July—is prime time for drafting your snow and ice removal RFP. Here's what a typical timeline might look like:

Draft RFP	Send out RFP	Choose your provider	Season begins	Season ends/ post-season inspection
Late spring/beginning of June	Early summer/by early July	Late summer/by early September	Early fall/beginning of October	Early spring



The Four Snow Pricing Models

Just as snow removal needs vary from business to business, pricing models are designed to meet varying needs as well. The four most common models are:

1. Per Occurrence/Per Push	2. Seasonal
Once accumulation begins, the provider services your site based on a set trigger (1 or 2 inches of accumulation, for example) as many times as the trigger is met, which is charged on a per occurrence basis. De-icing materials may also be applied when slippery conditions are present for a contracted fee.	Service begins from the first day of your snow removal contract for a fixed fee. It typically includes plowing, shoveling and deicing. Seasonal contracts are generally signed for a multiyear duration (two to three years is common). They tend to work best for areas with higher-than-average snowfall and offer a comprehensive range of pricing options that enable more certainty in budgeting for the services you need.
3. Event	4. Time and Materials
Accumulation begins and you pay a fee for service until accumulation ends or the event ends for a period defined in your contract. (For example: two hours with no additional accumulation would mark the end of a single event.) Typically within the industry, an event is 24 hours.	This model is often preferred by larger commercial properties that require specialized equipment, where a model like per push wouldn't be an effective option. It is customized based on the types of equipment and methods to be used and is priced by the hour

The Essentials to Include in Your RFP

So, what essential elements should your RFP contain to ensure your commercial properties are well covered?

1. Service expectations.

You'll want to clearly outline your level-of-service expectations, from the services you want completed and how you want them completed to any related requirements, such as specific equipment or snow removal or de-icing products to be used or avoided.

2. Site maps.

Your RFP should include site maps that specify the sidewalks and pathways to be cleared by the provider versus any that are the responsibility of the local municipality or are covered through Common Area Maintenance (CAM), as well as push maps that indicate where you want the snow to be pushed so that it doesn't impede work or traffic.

3. Prioritized areas.

In the event of a severe storm event or other potential challenges, you'll want to indicate which areas of each property are the highest priorities—for example, specific parking lots, sidewalks, driveways or loading docks—so your provider knows which areas to clear first.

4. Service times.

In addition to including them in your scope of work, calling out the times when service needs to be completed in your RFP ensures that employees and customers can access your property safely.

5. Communication and reporting.

Your RFP should lay out your expectations regarding reporting on the work being completed, including pre-storm communication as well as timeframes and the preferred format and frequency for communication and reporting of services.

6. Liability coverage.

To be certain you're covered for potential issues like slip-and-fall claims as well as damage that can occur during snow and ice removal, confirm that your provider has the necessary liability insurance by stipulating this in your RFP.

7. Above-and-beyond stipulations.

If you have requirements for your properties that go beyond typical industry standards for snow and ice removal, your RFP is the place to share them. For example, if you want snow to be hauled away versus the typical push process, note it so that potential providers can adjust their estimates as needed.





RFP Mistakes to Avoid

When it comes to the RFP process, one small mistake can cascade into many more that can ultimately hinder or even derail your snow removal program. Here are a few you'll want to be sure to avoid.

Mistake 1: Starting your RFP process late

Starting your process late means you will likely end up paying more and missing out on opportunities to work with the most qualified local servicers because they'll already be booked. Start putting your plans together in June so that you can send your RFP out in July. Ask providers to respond with pricing details within 30 days. This gives you a month to make your decision and have contracts approved and signed internally by the beginning of September, and in turn gives your chosen provider 30 days to get your site(s) linked with local servicers in time for the first snowfall.

Mistake 2: Not having site maps

After your contract is signed, you can do site walks with your provider to better understand where snow should be pushed, but it shouldn't be the first time you broach the subject. Start the conversation by including site maps in your RFP. It will provide a higher level of clarity up front for both you and potential providers to ensure your needs are understood and that your services are priced appropriately to meet them.

Mistake 3: Not ensuring internal alignment before sending your RFP

Sometimes the big-picture corporate priorities for snow removal and the actual needs at the site level for each location don't line up, which can create issues for your program, setting you up for failure. Getting on the same page internally (ideally before sharing your RFP) can help you secure the services you really need—when, where and how you need them to be performed.

How to Pick the Right Partner for You

There are a variety of factors to consider when selecting your snow removal partner. While some may be specific to your company and its sites, others are more universal, like these four:

- **Service verification.**
Your provider should have a documented verification process in place that enables you to quickly confirm essentials like service start and stop times, services performed (via before-and-after service photos) and site weather conditions.
- **Expertise.**
From an experienced front-office staff to certified snow professionals in the field, your snow removal partner should have the credentials and expertise to ensure your success.
- **Efficiency.**
Finding a partner that can maintain a high standard of service without breaking your budget isn't always easy. One way your costs can be reduced is by bundling snow removal with other services you need, such as landscaping, parking lot sweeping or property maintenance.
- **Communication.**
Having an open flow of communication and transparency with your provider is essential (and perhaps the most important factor), from timely pre-storm communication to communicating in real time about services being performed and when your sites are cleared to open. This also helps ensure that your post-season inspection goes smoothly.

Scope of Work



Level of Service

The specific services to be performed and the overall expected outcome for your snow removal program.

How you want the services to be performed and any related requirements, such as specific equipment or snow removal or de-icing products to be used or avoided.

Pre-Season Planning and Rollout

Once your contract has been signed, there are still a few items you'll want to cross off your to-do list before the season begins, including:

1. Pre-season inspection.

Typically, your snow removal partner will visit the site for an inspection to determine exactly which areas need to be maintained and where the snow will be pushed.

2. Staking.

During the inspection, the areas to be staked (if any) will be highlighted to increase visibility for snow removal and help prevent damage to hardscape and landscape.

3. Communication methods.

While your RFP presents your overall communications expectations for your program, it's beneficial to reaffirm your preferred methods and channels of communication during the pre-season planning phase.



DURING THE SEASON

Once your season is underway, your provider should have a solid understanding of the services you need and how they should be delivered, thanks to all of your planning and prep on the front end. But because this is a weather-centered program and the weather can be unpredictable, you'll want to keep the lines of communication with your provider open and have plans (and back-up plans) in case of weather emergencies. These tips will guide you through the season no matter what the forecast has in store.

TIP 1: Don't forget the key to snow season success: ongoing communication.

While we've covered the importance of setting your overall expectations for communication throughout your program as well as communicating during an emergency event, it's also important to simply ensure you're continuing that ongoing dialogue and are in regular communication with your provider throughout the season.

This can mean anything from updates on work being completed on your sites pre- and post-event to dealing with service failures or complaints. Clear and continuous communication helps ensure your service needs are met and that there aren't any major post-season inspection issues that haven't already been communicated.

TIP 2: Be sure to set expectations for emergency snow events.

While a major snowstorm can create hazards for everyone, it's important to set expectations regarding the level of service that can be maintained in such conditions. For example, in an event where a state of emergency is declared, contractors might not be able to perform services until the emergency is lifted.

To avoid confusion or a potential further delay in services, be sure to confirm that your team members are authorized to give permission (or that they know who is authorized to give the go-ahead) to your contractor provider in an emergency situation.

TIP 3: Leverage technology.

Experienced snow removal providers employ various technologies from tracking potential snow events for early preparation to providing updates on the status of your properties. These systems typically provide before and after photos as well, so you can monitor your sites from afar. Make sure you are comfortable with your provider's technology platform and that it integrates with any of your existing systems, if necessary.

TIP 4: Communicate back-up plans for landlord-managed properties.

Even though you might not be responsible for removing the snow, you still need to know what your back-up plan is. Your store/site manager should know as well, in case there is a failure with the landlord's provider. This will allow your provider to quickly come to your rescue if they are needed.



AFTER THE SEASON

Once the winter season winds down, it's time to complete this year's program with a post-season inspection. Your contractor provider should complete an assessment for any potential damage, taking pictures to document any issues, and removing any staking that had been done. If there are damages, they'll be handled at this time. (Note that sand removal may be needed if sand was used in your program. It will be completed at this point, but the responsibility for its removal should be set out in your contract so it's clear to all parties up front.)

Your provider may also complete a separate post-season review to discuss how your snow program went overall, adjustments or improvements that can be made for next season, and performance against service level agreements outlined in the RFP and contract.

Having a solid partnership with clear and open communication throughout the season is critical to achieving your program's goals. If you focus on the work that needs to be accomplished before the season begins, you can leave the majority of the heavy lifting during the season in the capable hands of your provider.



Prepare for Snow Season Now

If you haven't started planning your RFP for next winter yet, get going today. And if you're in need of an experienced, trusted snow and ice removal partner, consider the experts at Chain Store Maintenance - an MCS Company. Contact **Chain Store** today to request a quote and learn how we can partner with you to effectively meet all of your commercial snow removal needs.