

Is there a model snow removal policy for city sidewalks?

Policies and discussions about snow removal policies were gleaned from dozens of cities and online discussion forums. From this effort, features of a model snow removal policy for city sidewalks were established. A model policy includes the following elements:

1. Dedicated City Sidewalk Snow Crews

It is essential that the City begin clearing sidewalks the day of the snow, simultaneous with their street clearance activities. Sidewalk crews' responsibilities include clearing sidewalks in front of non-compliant properties after a grace period. (Madison WI)

2. Clear Multi-use Paths

Multi-use paths given same priority as arterial streets. The parks department clears these and gives highest priority to these paths, before ice rinks, for example. (Madison WI)

3. Timely Removal

Cities that experience regular snow require that snow be cleared by 9 AM or Noon of the day following the snow (Boulder CO, Madison WI). Some policies state explicitly that one must arrange for another person to clear one's sidewalks whenever one is out of town. (Saline MI)

Policies that allow for 24 or 48 hours after snow ending appear to be more ambiguous and thus are less enforceable--people cannot be relied upon to know when the snow ended and such a policy may cloud responsibilities in an ongoing storm.

4. Enforcement of Requirements

It is necessary to include a mechanism for just enforcement. A high fine is one way to go. Preferred, however, is to have a city crew that clears the sidewalk and assesses a high fee plus a billing charge. (Madison WI)

5. Abrasives for Ice Accumulation

When conditions result in an ice accumulation, abrasives must be applied. For these purposes, the city supplies sand for free at specific locations. (Champaign IL)

6. Brochure, Web page, and Zone Requirements Map

The city publishes and distributes the policy to ensure the public is adequately informed. Identify geographic or zoned responsibilities via online map. More stringent removal requirements may be applied within certain areas or on specific thoroughfares. (Champaign IL)

7. Assistance for Elderly and Infirm

Those residents who are physically unable to clear their sidewalks can request assistance. Sidewalk snow removal by city crews or neighborly assistance will be arranged. (Madison WI)

8. Complaint Hotline

A telephone hotline is provided to report sidewalks that need clearing.
(Madison WI)

9. Sidewalk Maintenance

When there is no snow, the city inspects sidewalks to ensure that heaving or cracking is not so extensive that it would interfere with shoveling the walkway.

10. Sidewalk Buffers

Sidewalks are separated from street with sufficient buffer areas to allow snow storage. Snow plow operators are conscientious not to needlessly bury sidewalks when plowing.

Links to Sidewalk Snow Removal Policies:

- Madison, WI - <http://www.cityofmadison.com/residents/winter/sidewalks.cfm>
http://www.lawrenceks.org/web_based_agendas/2008/02-19-08/02-19-08h/fai_cm_snow_removal_madison_wi_memo.html
- Milwaukee - <http://www.mpw.net/Pages/sidesnow.htm>
- Ann Arbor - <http://www.a2gov.org/government/safetyservices/Police/Pages/SnowRemovalonSidewalks.aspx>
- Bloomington, MN - <http://www.ci.bloomington.mn.us/cityhall/dept/pubworks/mainten/strmain/snow.htm#notjust>
- Boulder, CO - http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=175&Itemid=1703
- Champaign, IL - http://www.ci.champaign.il.us/public_works/page.php?pn=snowice_walks
- Saline, MI - <http://city-saline.org/news/snowremoval>
- Washington State - <http://www.mrsc.org/Subjects/PubWorks/snow.aspx#Sidewalks>
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Discussions:

- <http://www.bikeplan.com/snowq.htm>

Submitted by:

David Levinger, PhD, PE, Principal
Transportation Usability Consulting
Seattle, WA
david@t-usability.com
(206) 390-8118