

Snow Blower Safety

During the winter months, snow blowers can be very useful, but they can also be dangerous. There have been multiple injuries associated with snow blowers, most often involving the hand or fingers, including amputations.

Here are some tips to keep you safe when using a snow blower

- ◆ Follow all manufacturer's instructions.
- ◆ Always turn off the engine on a gas machine or unplug the motor on an electric model before clearing a clog at the auger or discharge chute.
 - Use the clearing tool, never your hands or feet, to remove the clog.
 - Most injuries typically occur when the user tries to clear a clogged auger or discharge chute with their hands.
- ◆ Protect yourself from carbon-monoxide poisoning by starting and running gasoline-powered snow blowers outside rather than in your garage, shed or warehouse.
- ◆ Don't wear loose pants, jackets, scarves or other clothing which can get tangled in a snow blower's moving parts.
- ◆ Wear hearing protection, especially when operating gas-powered models.
- ◆ Wait until a gas model's engine is cool before refueling. Never refuel while a snow blower is running.
- ◆ For electric models, use an outdoor extension cord and an outlet with ground-fault circuit interrupter protection. Then be sure to keep the cord safely away from the spinning auger while working.

When purchasing a snow blower, look for these built-in safety features

- ◆ Many snow blower models include a clearing tool for clogs. The tool is stored within easy reach on the machine, making it convenient for safe clearing.
- ◆ Manufacturers have addressed injury prevention to the hands with a handlebar dead-man control that stops the snow blower when released.

Other precautions to consider during snow removal activities

- ◆ **Drink water.** Dehydration is an important issue in the winter as well as the summer. Drink a couple glasses of water about thirty minutes before you begin. Stay hydrated throughout all work periods.
- ◆ **Warm up.** Stretch the muscles in your back, legs, shoulders and arms prior to starting. Warm muscles work more efficiently and are less prone to injury.
- ◆ **Dress in layers.** Putting on a heavy coat is often done prior to starting this task. This is potentially dangerous because you may quickly overheat. Wear a shirt under a sweater, under a light jacket and strip off layers as you become warm.

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- ◆ **Cover your face and hands in extreme cold.** Frostbite can occur easily in subzero temperatures, particularly to the extremities. Ensure that your fingertips are fully covered with gloves, wear layered socks under your boots and cover your nose and ears. Use sunscreen due to increased reflective exposure from the snow.
- ◆ **Take frequent breaks.** Take a break every five or 10 minutes while you're working. Never let your heart rate exceed 85 percent of its maximum. To estimate your maximum heart rate, subtract your age from 220. Pace yourself.
- ◆ **Slip protection.** Carry and use anti-slip and supportive shoes or attachments that fit the base of your shoes to prevent slips.

Winter Preparation

In cold, wet conditions, common dangers include slips and falls as well as vehicle accidents. Taking simple precautions can prevent accidents and injuries.

Preventing slips

Areas that may become slick and require extra caution include stairs, ramps, tile floors, parking lots and metal parts of equipment.

- ◆ Have an excellent snow and ice removal program in place.
- ◆ Place non-skid floor mats and caution signs in slippery, high-traffic areas.
- ◆ Use traction devices that strap onto shoes when conditions require them.
- ◆ Use the right shoes. Anti-slip soles are essential. Shoe soles need to have thin cuts, often called siping, that disperse water and grip the ground.

Driving safety

- ◆ Slips can happen when entering and exiting your vehicle, so be cautious. Use a three-point stance when getting in and out of your vehicle. Use a grab-bar or doorframe for stability.

- ◆ Be aware that the vehicle itself can lose traction causing uncontrolled skids.
 - When roads are slick, slow down, leave extra following distance between yourself and other cars and do not make sudden vehicular movements.
 - If you begin to skid, turn the wheel in the direction you want the vehicle to go. Ease your foot off the accelerator, and do not hit the brakes.



- ◆ Know the weather conditions you will encounter and plan ahead.
- ◆ Inspect your vehicle for proper tires and other winter driving gear.
- ◆ Be sure that chains and cold weather gear are on board and ready for use.
- ◆ Assume that roads, bridges and exits are icy, and be ready for them.
- ◆ Keep lights, windows and mirrors clean. This is especially important in low visibility situations such as darkness, ice or fog.
- ◆ If pulling over due to an emergency, increase your visibility to passing traffic. Activate the vehicle's hazard warning lights, wear your safety vest, set up a warning triangle or flares and assume that ongoing traffic does not see you.

Remember, ice is twice as slippery at 30 °F as at 0 °F.

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