

PUBLIC WORKS

Snowplow Operator Training Tips

As Public Safety employees, DPW Snowplow Operators are tasked with keeping the roads safe following winter storms and thus should be trained accordingly. This critical emergency response function is often taken for granted but the risks associated are high and requires a professional, robust approach to ensure each operator is trained appropriately. Use the checklist below as a training guide.

Prewinter Snow and Ice Preparation

Prior to the season, each operator should inspect any plow routes they are expected to maintain.



- Inspect the plow route for hazards that could damage your plow such as tree roots, raised manholes/catch basins and road construction.
- Note changes to residential neighborhoods such as new landscaping, retaining walls, basketball hoops, etc.
- Remind residents and business owners of any rules regarding right of way and document your conversations.
- Set up a cones course in your DPW yard or a large parking lot in your City or Town to practice with the plow on, including backing.
- Train operators on how to attach the plow to the truck safely.
- Test all equipment to ensure it is working effectively such as GPS, laser guides, lights, alarms, etc.
- Communicate what to do when confronted by a disgruntled resident in the field. For example, following a damaged mailbox or plowed -in driveway. Be mindful that fatigue can cause irritability but a professional and calm response is best to de-escalate these situations.
- Communicate what to do in the event of an accident or confrontation with residents.
- Explain the procedure for reporting violations such as vehicles that are parked illegally or obstacles found in the road.
- Give extra break time: Keep in mind that many drivers are not comfortable driving in the snow and to always keep space between vehicles and allow for extra stopping time.
- Avoid backing when possible. Back up only when you have no other way to do the job.
- Use your mirrors constantly to monitor your side clearances and to ensure the plow is performing properly.

Inspect Your Vehicle

Train operators on how to inspect the plow to ensure it is working properly.

- In the event that an accident occurs it is important to document your vehicle inspections and preventative maintenance (PM's) as these records could be questioned.
- Check your tires, fluid levels, lights, brakes, chains, plows, wings, spreaders, back up alarms etc.
- Test all equipment to ensure it is working effectively such as GPS, laser guides, radios, etc.
- Clearly communicate who is responsible for inspecting each vehicle and what to do if an issue is found. Keep in mind that during the winter months, additional PM's could be required per the manufacturers recommendation.
- During breaks and when it is safe to do so, inspect the vehicle to make sure lights are visible and that rocks or equipment in your bed is safely secured so it doesn't fall out and cause an accident.
- Clear snow and ice from headlights, backlights and your windshield and warning lights as needed.

Incorporate Wellness Into Your Plan

Educate your staff on the risks involved from a health standpoint during the plow season and communicate your wellness related expectations.

Fatigue

- Explain the importance of self-monitoring fatigue levels and taking breaks.
- Communicate regularly with all operators to determine if they need a break. Do not put the public at risk by pushing your limits. If possible, provide a sleep room during the winter with cots or encourage those employees who live in Town to go home to rest.
- Keep in mind that circumstances may change at home (sick family member, newborn child, injuries, stress) that can impact fatigue.
- Be mindful of any medications taken that could contribute to fatigue levels.
- Plan ahead for extra rest as needed. Since we all know storms are coming during the winter, take extra steps to ensure proper rest throughout the season.

Hydration

- If your body is dehydrated it will become fatigued or lethargic. As your blood volume decreases, less blood is pumped to your heart and brain which contributes to feelings of fatigue.
- Coffee, soda and energy drinks that are high in caffeine contribute to dehydration. Although these drinks provide a short term stimulant effect, they will eventually wear off and cause a crash effect.
- Avoid chronic dehydration. As a gauge, drink at least half of your body weight in ounces of water each day. (200 lbs =100 oz.)
- Signs of dehydration could include dry mouth, dry skin, muscle cramps, lightheadedness, dark urine, irritability and tiredness.
- Avoid alcohol. Alcohol consumption even in moderation will increase fatigue and cause dehydration.

Eat Healthy

- Since take out options are limited during storms, it is best to plan ahead by bringing in healthy meals such as turkey chili, soups, fajitas. Provide your staff with healthy meals to help improve their fatigue levels.
- Fast foods or foods high in sugar will contribute to fatigue. These foods cause the digestive system to work harder and contribute to feelings of lethargy.
- Eat foods high in protein and healthy carbohydrates to help sustain energy levels.

Know the Signs of Heart Attacks

During the winter DPW professionals see an uptick in heart attacks. This is due to a number of factors, pre-existing and undiagnosed circulatory problems, chronic lack of sleep, increased workload, poor diet, and poor hydration. Additionally cold temperatures require your respiratory system to work harder to breathe as you're your nasal cavity and windpipe work to warm up cold air to your body's temperature. When you factor in snow shoveling, it can be a recipe for disaster. Prepare your body for the increased work load by staying hydrated, eating healthy and getting plenty of sleep.

Dress in Layers

- Dress so that you can add or decrease layers as needed. If you need to get out to address a problem you should be properly prepared to do so.

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