

# Snow jobs don't have to be so painful

**I**f you live north of the Mason-Dixon Line, snow removal is just part of life. And even in the South, it can occasionally be a nuisance. Across the middle of the U.S., the unpredictability of snow is a "catch-22" no-win situation, where you can be faced with the frustration of whether or not to even buy snow removal equipment.

But just as soon as the budget-minded professional—who has saved money by *not* purchasing snow equipment—is faced with the once-in-a-decade blizzard, he or she can feel "a penny wise and a pound foolish."

Even in the North where the question is only when (not if) it will snow, having the right equipment to handle the various kinds of snow can be a challenge.

Powder snow or thick, wet snow; sleet or snow mixed with rain that freezes on impact all present different problems. Let's start with equipment.

### Unpredictable?

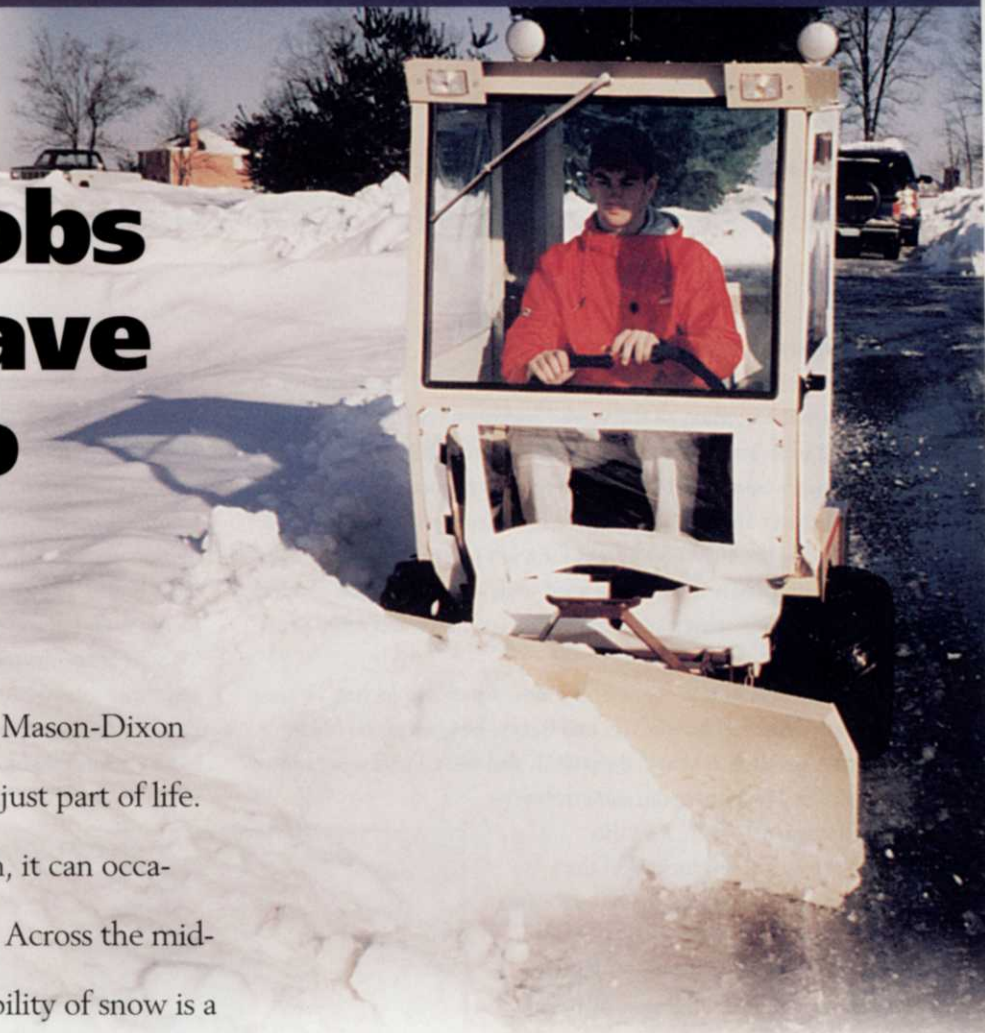
Being prepared for snow removal has its rewards for maintenance shops and contractors alike. But if you're a grounds/landscape contractor, the added dimension of offering clients snow removal services during the winter is an ideal way to strengthen those relationships. It can also help smooth out cash flow during traditionally slow months.

However, buying snow equipment can be prohibitive if you don't choose versatile grounds maintenance systems that offer a wide range of year-round attachments, which most contractors and

in-house grounds managers recommend.

Mark Moyer of Kirksville, Mo., is right in the middle of the "unpredictable snow" belt. His ability to offer year-round service—including snow removal—has both strengthened his relationships with clients and added significantly to his bottom line.

"My approach to everything has changed since I saw my first demonstration of a zero-radius mower. The Grasshopper system, for example, is really a grounds maintenance system, not just a mower. The system's attachments are what allow me



## TIP #1:

*Choose versatile equipment that can be used not only in the snow, but also in your primary seasonal business.*

to work year-round.

"As soon as I bought my first zero-radius unit, I quit my job and started accepting all the work I had been turning down, including snow removal jobs. My income jumped immediately."

Moyer's equipment choices were rotary broom, dozer blade, snowthrower and enclosed cab for his three mowers.

"Having the right equipment for a job just makes sense," Moyer says. "I compare it with eating soup with a spoon instead of a fork. The right equipment makes the job easier, faster and more profitable."

Moyer says that for light fluffy snow up to five inches, he uses the broom. If the snow is wet and heavy, he goes to the blade, which also handles heavy, deep slush and sleet. For deeper snows and drifts, Moyer uses the snowthrower.

"If it is really deep, I set the snowthrower a few inches off the ground and cut a path," he notes. "Once you have a path, then it's a piece of cake. Zero-radius maneuverability lets me get into spots other guys just can't reach with bigger or less maneuverable equipment and is a lot faster than the smaller hand-pushed snow blowers. I don't even own a shovel."

Moyer's clients include banks, 24-hour restaurants, churches, private residences, the multi-purpose building at the fairgrounds and doctors' offices.

### **Predictable!**

Dave Combe of Salt Lake City, on the other hand, contracts snow removal for a wide variety of residences, condos, apartment complexes and commercial clients.

"Of course, we have Western blades and another V-blade for our three trucks. They take care of the big parking lots and streets. But then we go back in with our 721D Grasshopper with the snowthrower attachment and that gives us another three feet. It throws the snow over the berm and finishes the job."

Combe also uses a dozer blade and broom.

"We charge \$20 a push (per residential driveway) and we can knock off one in about 10 minutes," he observes. "We have about 80 driveways that we take care of regularly, in addition to the lots and other commercial customers."

Combe recommends low-pressure tires without chains, which

give you traction even on inclined driveways.

"We also start clearing even while it's still snowing if it's going to be a really deep snow. That helps us keep ahead of it, and the people seem to appreciate it, too."

Warren Brown, who is in charge of snow removal at John Knox Village in Lee's Summit, Mo. (the nation's largest retirement community), uses 60 hand-shovelers to clear sidewalks in eight hours. They use dozer blade-equipped mowers and John Deere walk-behind snow blowers for the 25 miles of sidewalks.

Streets are cleared with two one-ton trucks with sand spreaders and three four-wheel-drive Ford Broncos with 8-foot blades. Two Ford tractors equipped with rear blades also help clear streets, and New Holland skid loaders are used for parking areas.

Tom Hays of Alexandria, Minn., clears snow an average of 12 times a year, including drifts of up to four feet. He appreciates movable deflector chutes.

"They can be easily turned around with your feet to keep the snow blowing in the same direction whether you are going down or coming back," Hays relates. "It sounds like a little thing, but when you are out there moving around in deep snow, being able to direct the snow discharge without stopping is important."

### **City maintenance**

Marc Evens, parks crew leader for Kaysville City, Utah, has to get around a honeycomb of walkways and sidewalks when cleaning up around the two-block city office campus.

"I can't imagine how long it would take with conventional hand-pushed snow removal equipment," says Evens, "but the zero-radius units are ideal for that kind of job. If the snow is 8 to 10 inches or more, we set the snowthrowers high and make a couple of passes. There is no depth they can't handle if you either go slow the first pass or just set it high for the first pass and then repeat at a lower setting.

"Our snowthrowers are also ideal for keeping the cemetery clear because they don't scalp the grass under the snow. And their zero-radius ability makes removing snow around traditional markers or flat markers quick and efficient."

