

# PREPPING FOR THE

**R**ecord-setting snowfall, coupled with strong winds, socked cities across the United States this past winter. For many the snow has been an unwelcomed surprise. And in most parts of the country, people equipped to rid their region of that snow remain in high demand.

For safety and sanity, it's critical to remove snow and ice from traveled areas quickly and thoroughly. A haphazard approach will create more problems than it solves, making it imperative for winter contractors to be thoroughly prepared.

After 36 years in the snow-removal business, Randy Strait could easily be considered an expert on getting rid of the white stuff. He owns Arctic Snow & Ice Control Inc., and has tackled everything from his own driveway to parking lots at some of the nation's largest businesses. He says the key to quality work and reduced liability is to be prepared for each and every snow removal job.

No matter the size of the job, Strait says, "it's better to be safe than sorry when it comes to preparing for snow removal." Although there are many issues that need to be addressed beforehand, such as the size of the lot and the state of the equipment, taking a little time to do so will ensure any event is handled quickly and effectively. This is especially true, Strait says, because "the climate is changing and you never know what Mother Nature may bring."

By learning to expect the unexpected, snow contractors will be poised to handle any winter weather scenario. And knowing how and for what to prepare when a snow event hits is critical to success.

## Property pointers

Although all parking lots may seem the same to the average person, snow removal contractors know each is vastly different. To clear each unique

property well, snow contractors must consider several factors before ever arriving onsite. The first aspect is the property's size.

Imagine a building contractor preparing for a new home construction job. When drawing up blueprints, he or she must know the dimensions of the empty lot. This will help determine the size of house that can fit on the property, how large of a crew is needed, the quantity of supplies that will be required, and how long it will take to complete the project. In the same way, a snow removal contractor won't be prepared to plow without first knowing the size of the property being cleared.

The property size will dictate the type of equipment necessary, and the number of machines and personnel required to expediently handle the situation. However, when attempting to estimate equipment needs, Strait stresses the importance of using machines and plows currently owned.

"You should always estimate based on the plows and equipment you currently have," Strait explains. "I've seen companies that feel they need to buy new equipment and plows to suit a

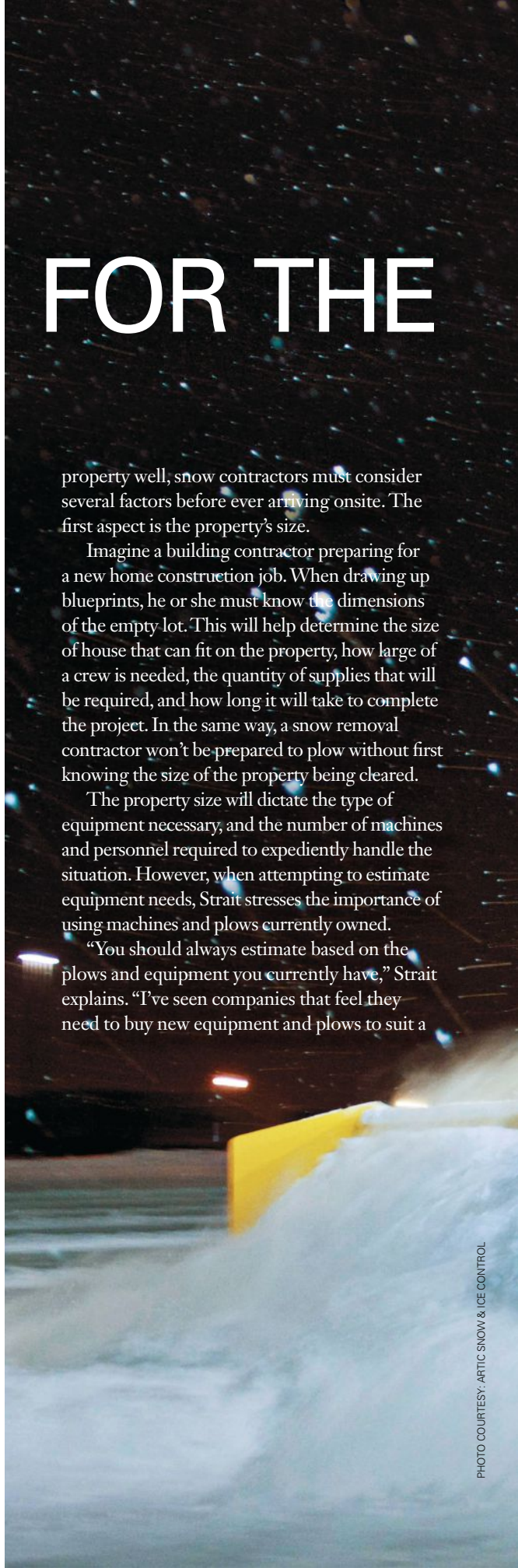


PHOTO COURTESY: ARCTIC SNOW & ICE CONTROL

# POWDER

How to prepare for *any* snow event

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BY RANDY STRAIT



new client's lot. But the problem with purchasing a special machine and new plow for just one particular lot arises when, maybe that client doesn't renew the contract. Now the contractor is left with too much equipment for his size and operational needs, and it becomes a waste."

This touches on Strait's next point: Knowing the property's size can help prevent overstocking, and reduce the likelihood of time and money wasted on excess machines and staff. It will also avoid bringing equipment that may be too large for the job.

"Everyone always wants to push more snow, faster. Efficiency drives the majority of our decisions," Strait says. But he stresses that the largest plow may not always be the best plow for the job. For example, a snow contractor with a 19-ft., loader-mounted snow pusher may want to



### BE WORTH YOUR SALT

Rather than take the time to plan for fast, complete snow removal, many contractors rely heavily on salt as a primary tool. Salt has advantages, but also comes with its fair share of disadvantages, all of which snow contractors must be aware.

There's no doubt salt can be beneficial in some situations, but recent shortages have affected many contractors' abilities to secure adequate amounts for their workload. In addition to shortages and, of course, the high cost of salt, the narrow window of its effectiveness is another factor to consider.

"Salt is most effective when the temperature reaches 20°F and above, and the sun is out to activate it," Randy Strait explains. Obviously, these types of ideal days are few and far between. The best bet is to remove the snow and ice as completely as possible to reduce or fully eliminate the need for salt, and prevent slip-and-fall hazards as well.

opt instead for his 10-ft. skid-steer snow pusher to properly handle a mid-size supermarket parking lot. A 10-ft. snow pusher will be ideal for clearing narrower aisles, handicapped parking spaces, and will even work in the case of plowing during the day, when traffic is present.

Finally, an accurate estimate of how long the job will take should be determined. Many contractors that use containment plows utilize a formula based on acres and pushing capacity of these types of plows. For example, one 10-ft. containment plow with a pushing capacity of 13 yds. will take roughly 30 minutes to plow anywhere from two to three acres — but of course, this will be dependent on several outside variables that will change from event to event.

A snow event with 4-in. accumulation of heavy, wet snow will take longer to clear than an event dropping 2 in. of light, fluffy snow. A contractor using, for example, a 16-ft. model with a 28-yd. capacity can estimate the same job in the same weather conditions to take about half the time as the 10-ft. plow mentioned above.

But running an efficient snow removal operation involves more than just sending out the crew and instructing everyone to start plowing. Having a plan in place for how to clear the lot is crucial for maximized efficiency, especially in the case of larger properties. For example, it may be wise to divide the area into sections and assign each operator his or her own area. This gives each individual a specific portion on which to focus efforts, leading to more efficient plowing and eliminating the possibility of doubling-up on a single area.

Parking lots pose additional challenges of which contractors must be aware to ensure quick and thorough plowing. Whether a commercial facility, shopping center or supermarket, a business' parking lot often includes obstacles such as light poles, cart corrals and medians. Noting and planning for these small details will make a big difference, both in providing top-notch customer service and doing a thorough job to prevent accidents.

Furthermore, some property owners will only require the lot be cleared; others expect curbs and sidewalks to be taken care of as well. Contractors responsible for clearing these additional areas for pedestrian traffic will want to note them all, and factor in the appropriate equipment and personnel, as it will require additional time and resources.

This level of adequate preparation is key, as every minute in snowfall response time can be crucial.

### Pick your plow

For a business to successfully achieve clean, clear results, a good snowplow is an essential part of the snow removal team.

A snowplow is more than just a piece of equipment, it's the real workhorse of a snow removal operation. The better the plow, the better the snow removal job will be, leading to less chance of excess ice build-up. For example, containment-style plows, also known as box plows, have come a long way over the years, and many different styles and models exist, each with their own technology and features.

Looking for a plow that incorporates features  
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## SNOW REMOVAL



It's important to understand what size of equipment is best for which job.

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designed for fast, efficient removal of snow and ice will be key in effective operation and preventing liability issues.

Many snowplows incorporate steel cutting edges, which are very effective at scraping even hard-packed snow and ice down to the pavement. Some manufacturers offer sectional moldboard designs, which contour to variances in the pavement grade, allowing the plow to get into dips and depressions in the pavement. This allows for cleaner results, and more snow and ice to be removed with each pass. Recently, special drop-and-go hitch designs have been introduced to further enhance the amount of snow and ice removed with each pass. These hitches let the plow move freely from the equipment — and automatically adjust the plow to any change in pavement.

Beyond boosting the effectiveness of a snowplowing operation, the equipment can affect a business' ability to respond to and handle each snow event quickly and efficiently — both positively and negatively. To ensure the equipment doesn't slow down the crew, it's imperative to keep inventory well maintained and serviced.

### Keep equipment in check

In nearly every area of the country, a snow event will show up unannounced at some point. It's not uncommon for the weather to go from 60°F one day to blustery, blizzard-like conditions the next. For any contracting company, it's crucial to keep all machines adequately maintained so they're ready to tackle any job — and last throughout several hours of tough plowing.

The first step in any proper routine maintenance plan is the most basic: Keep the snow-

plow clean. Taking just a few moments at the end of each shift to quickly clean the plow will provide a two-fold benefit. First, a good cleaning will remove any excess ice or salt that could damage the plow or cause corrosion. Second, it will allow the operator to spot any obvious issues, such as damaged or severely worn parts. Replace these immediately to avoid a decrease in performance or a full-scale breakdown in the middle of a plowing job.

Good maintenance is an ongoing process, and should receive adequate attention, both during the season as well as the off-season. Investing a small amount of time into basic plow upkeep will pay dividends, as the plow will be ready and waiting to go as soon as the flakes begin to fly.

To further ensure readiness at the drop of a flurry, Strait also advises owning all snow removal equipment and machines, rather than renting. If a machine breaks down at 3 a.m., waiting for the rental center to open and finding time to fix it is out of the question. Worst-case scenario, according to Strait: "The operator could be held up several days waiting for a piece of equipment to be repaired."

In addition to owning equipment, having a mechanic on staff to address issues promptly will ensure minimal time is lost.

It's beneficial for a snow removal fleet to include more equipment and machines than needed at any given time. In the event a plow becomes damaged during use, having an extra one on hand to replace the damaged one immediately will eliminate costly downtime. Rather than leaving a machine idle while its plow is being fixed, it can be fitted with a backup unit and be right back

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## SNOW REMOVAL

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out on the jobsite making money.

Readiness comes down to more than just a shiny, clean fleet of equipment and eager snow removal operators ready to move the white stuff. A few final details will ensure precious minutes aren't lost when heading out for a snow removal job.

### Ready when you are

All snow events must be handled with urgency, as every minute counts. When it comes to the argument of whether to wait for the snowfall to stop before plowing, or get out there and attack the white stuff while it's still coming down, Strait's philosophy is simple: "Don't hesitate for a minute. As soon as the snow begins to

fall, we're out there immediately."

When faced with an impending winter storm or blizzard, Strait urges how crucial it is for the operator to respond quickly so the snow doesn't get too far ahead. The longer it takes a crew to respond, the more time snow has to accumulate and ice to build up — and the more likely it will be to cause a detrimental slip-and-fall accident.

The first impediment to a quick response time is obvious: bad weather. A snow event will make travel conditions to the jobsite less-than-ideal, so the closer personnel and equipment can be to the jobsite, the faster they can respond.

"We park equipment onsite and hire guys who live close by the account to service those areas so they can get to the equipment quickly," Strait says. While this process is ideal for larger businesses with a sizable fleet of equipment and resources to hire based on location, smaller contracting companies may need to find an alternate way to ensure each job is handled in a timely fashion.

A company with a limited number of operators and equipment may want to consider a phone tree calling system or a chain-of-command based on location and desired minimum response time. By planning this out ahead of time, and having a point person in charge close to each site, less time will be wasted deciding which operator should be sent to a certain area.

Finally, even the simplest policy can save time. Consider backing equipment on the lot, facing the exit, so it's ready to go in an emergency. This will shave off crucial minutes in the event of an urgent snow situation, leaving less time for snow accumulation.

Although responding to a snow event immediately seems like the obvious way to handle a storm, it's easier said than done. Knowing how to prepare, and for what to prepare will ensure every snow event is handled quickly and efficiently. **L.M.**

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*Strait is president of Arctic Ice & Snow Control Products (ArcticSnowAndIce.com).*

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