

# SNOW+ICE

GUIDE

## SHOVELING *dirt*



The lack of snow in 2011-2012 hit landscapers where it hurts — in their wallets. **BY BETH GERACI**

**2** 011 WILL GO DOWN AS one of the wildest weather years in history. Spring mercilessly flooded landscapes with rain. Summer and fall brought an onslaught of tornadoes. And for much of the country, winter brought, well, nothing — except mild temperatures, that is. So if landscaping companies were seeking redemption in their snow business, they didn't find it there.

### Hard times

This winter was definitely challenging, says Roscoe Klausung, president of Lexington, KY-based Klausung Group, whose snow business constitutes "the highest margin work that we do."

In 2011, Klausung Group's snow

revenue was down 60 to 75%. "That's pretty significant," Klausung laments. "It means you're going to start the landscaping season cash poor."

At Environmental Management Services in Dublin, OH, business was a struggle, too. Vice President of Operations Gary Clark says the company usually has enough snow for 8 to 10 plowings and 18 to 30 saltings. But last winter, "some of my customers I didn't even service," Clark says.

In fact, only about half of Environmental Management Services' customers needed plow service, and the company's snow revenue was down by 80%. "I do about 4 to 5 million (dollars) a year, and this year I did just over a million," Clark marvels.

"It's very disheartening when you don't see any snow falling," he says. "The double punch for us is we just came off the rainiest year in local Central Ohio history. We've seen more rainfall this past year than ever before. My

profits were cut in half already because of the amount of rain that fell."

Since Environmental Management Services relies on its snow revenue to carry it through the spring, the company's had to turn to banks to get additional lines of credit.

### Layoffs

"We do quite a bit of commercial construction," Clark says, "so it was mild enough here that we did commercial construction and some pruning on trees and shrubs. But I also had to lay off more people than I ever had to before."

When you lay off employees, there's always the risk they won't come back. In fact, 15% of Clark's employees moved on to other jobs. Since his summer staff usually comprises 350 workers, "15% to me is a lot," he says. Now, he's resorted to using temporary services to fill his summer labor positions.

And "that doesn't work out well,"

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he says, "because temporary services, it's really people who are only mildly interested in finding work. The guys will work for a couple days usually, not more than a week, and then my supervisors are pulling their hair out."

## Hot and cold

Mariani Landscape in Lake Bluff, IL services a 25-mile radius in the Chicago suburbs. Snowfall in 2011-2012 was "very light" says Mariani Service Program Manager Chris Paisley. "We actually had only four plowable events where we sent everybody out."

Between drivers and shovelers, Mariani Landscape employs 130 snow workers in the winter, servicing about 300 residential properties and 30 commercial properties. The residential clients pay per push, while commercial clients are contracted for the season. Thanks to those commercial contracts, Mariani's snow revenue was only slightly down in 2011-2012.

"We're balanced out pretty well," Paisley says. Having a balance of residential and commercial work is important, he adds, because "in a down year, you still have the contracted work. And in heavier snow years, we may not do as well on the contracted work, because your expenditures on labor, equipment and fuel are greater. In a year like this, it kind of washes itself out."

Some of Clark's customers sign contracts for the season as well. Others pay per push. Some of those under contract "were looking at me saying, 'Do I really have to pay you? There's no snow,'" he recalls. "Yes, you do."

As for Mariani, the company was further helped by the fact it didn't invest in new equipment this winter.

Klausing wasn't so fortunate.

"We actually ramped up for a pretty significant snow year — invested in several new pieces of equipment," he says. "We spent about \$75,000 building up a salt house that will hold 900 tons



**The winter of 2010-2011 brought ample snow for Roscoe Klausing's business (above and left). But sights like these were incredibly rare this winter.**

of bulk salt. It's certainly not full, but I'm sitting on a lot of inventory right now."

In response to the overstock, Klausing Group has made efforts to store salt properly to ensure the company's inventory does not shrink before the winter of 2012-2013.

Klausing knows full well timing is everything. In the heart of the winter, his service area in Kentucky had just two half-inch snows. "Then of all things, the first week of March we got 5 inches on a Monday morning, which was the first time plows had been run in 13, 14 months," he says. "It was really challenging."

Kujawa Enterprises, Inc. (KEI) in Oak Creek, WI, had a slow winter, too. The average snowfall there is 52 inches, says KEI vice president Joe Kujawa. This year, he says, less than 30 inches of snow fell in the area, "and 29 of that came this spring." His region had a "really weak" November and December, he says. However, KEI's huge spring business compensated for its winter losses.

Klausing's company offers service discounts to customers who purchase retainer fees upfront. He's sold them successfully for at least 10 years running. After this winter, however, Klausing worries that his clients won't be so quick to

purchase them going forward.

"This is the first time in over a decade that some customers did not utilize their entire retainer fee," Klausing says. "That could make selling that feature to them more difficult in the future. It's easy to say, 'Put some percentage down.' And when that statement is followed by 'We've never had anyone not utilize their entire retainer fee,'" it's a pretty easy sell. Our company wins by getting some cash in the door up front."

## The upside

On the bright side, Clark says, looking at the 2012 season, his sales never have been better. The mild temperatures enabled him to start his landscape maintenance work early this year, and because of a jump in commercial construction, he expects his landscape division to double in size from 2011-2012. His maintenance division, meanwhile, is on track to grow by 15%.

December always has been a busy month for Mariani, producing an average of 23 inches of snow.

"Not this year," Paisley says.

But that's not all bad. Like Klausing, Mariani's snow products, such as salt bags, are still stacked in storage. That means the company will have to buy fewer snow and ice supplies in 2012.

Ultimately, landscapers hope the winter of 2011-2012 doesn't become the norm. After all, "I haven't had a winter like this since 1997," Clark says. **LMI**

# At season's end

Proper post-season maintenance is key to optimum performance next season. BY RANDY STRAIT

**C**ONTAINMENT SNOW **PUSHERS** are among the most common attachments found on small equipment such as skid steers and tractors. When winter winds down and the snow diminishes, most look forward to giving their pushers a break. But before parking the winter workhorse, take time for post-season maintenance. It's the easiest way to avoid a pile-up when the snow starts flying next season.

The maintenance checklist is much less time-consuming and labor-intensive than one might expect.

## Clean it up

The first, and perhaps simplest, step in a post-season maintenance plan is to give the pusher a good cleaning. A good power wash removes salt and debris and helps prevent corrosion and rusting.

After cleaning, allow the pusher to dry for a few hours, then apply a standard penetrant oil to pivot points, fasteners and nuts and bolts. Depending on the pusher, the cutting edges and the springs will need extra attention; they're more prone to wear and rusting. Be sure penetrant oil is applied liberally to these areas.

## Inspect, repair and replace

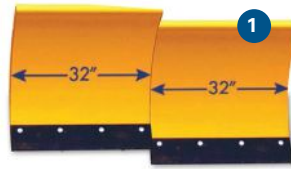
When the pusher is clean and dry, a thorough visual inspection should be conducted. All pushers have the same, standard areas to check, but there are differences, depending on the model.

Every pusher has either a rubber or steel cutting edge that should be

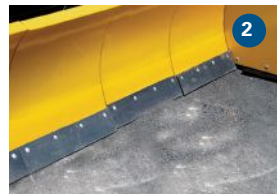
inspected and replaced if necessary. Rubber edges tend to wear faster than steel, so there's a higher likelihood of more frequent replacement needed on rubber-edge pushers. Regardless of what type, replacement does come at a cost. Sectional moldboard models alleviate both the time and expense of replacement. Rather than replacing a large, single cutting edge on a one-piece moldboard several feet wide, just the damaged section needs to be replaced.

Additionally, owners of sectional moldboard pushers should quickly inspect the mounting blocks. Mounting blocks are designed to handle a lot of pressure and abuse, protecting the operator, the tractor and other carrier equipment. As a result, they will occasionally need a quick replacement. With proper operation and care on the part of the operator, mounting blocks can last five years or more.

All pushers have wear shoes that should be inspected at the season's end, and replaced if severely worn. Those who own pushers with a standard hitch design may find their shoes wear faster and unevenly, requiring more frequent replacement. However, newer "drop-and-go" hitch designs ensure even wear on both shoes for longer life and fewer replacements. These designs also permit the shoes to "float" rather than drag



**1** Sectional moldboard models alleviate the time and expense of replacement of a large, single cutting edge on one-piece moldboards several feet wide.



**2** Every pusher has a cutting edge that should be inspected and replaced if necessary. Rubber edges tend to wear about five times faster than steel.



**3** Mounting blocks handle a lot of pressure and abuse, protecting both the operator and carrier equipment.

during operation, further extending life. Though it's less likely that a replacement will be needed,

owners of "drop-and-go" pushers do still need to check the shoes at season's end.

Finally, be sure to inspect all areas for loose or missing parts. Tighten or replace any pins, nuts or bolts.

## Simple storage

It's perfectly fine to keep pushers outside during the off-season. Again, be sure to spray penetrating oil onto rust-prone areas as an added safeguard.

Though pushers are virtually low-maintenance in the off-season, it's a good idea to inspect periodically — especially after a rainfall — to be sure rust isn't rearing its ugly head.

Post-season maintenance is the best way to extend the life of a snow pusher and guarantee years of reliable performance. Taking care of maintenance now ensures pushers are ready for next snow season. The flurries can come anytime. Be ready to push through Old Man Winter's first arrival. **LM**

*The author is president, Arctic Snow & Ice Control Products. Contact him at [rstrait@arctic-snowandice.com](mailto:rstrait@arctic-snowandice.com) or [ArcticSnowAndIce.com](http://ArcticSnowAndIce.com).*

# PRODUCTS

## Grasshopper

Quickly and efficiently plow a 5-ft.-wide path through deep snow and drifts along sidewalks, driveways and parking lots in one pass with Grasshopper's 60-in. V-Plow. The V-Plow maintains the zero-turn maneuverability of the Grasshopper, so the operator is constantly plowing with no wasted motion to make turns. For plowing wider paths, either side of the V-Plow can be used to continue to push out the snow. The V-Plow attaches in place of the out-front mower deck and features reversible/replaceable blades and a hand-controlled lift, locking the blade into one of four positions for quick and easy transport and loading. *Grasshopper-Mower.com/v-plow*



## Henderson Products

The Charge Clean-Power Series offers electric control for medium-duty snow and ice truck equipment (classes 3-7). It employs a CAN bus system to manage the entire snow and ice control package. This bumper-to-bumper management covers the snowplow, dump body, lighting, sand/salt spreader, spinner and pre-wet system. Numerous operator-friendly functions have been condensed into a single joystick controller that fits conveniently inside a cup holder. The Charge system also is intelligent, aiding in the reduction of applied material by incorporating proportional ground speed control into the spreader's material output functions, a feature commonly absent on spreaders using electric controls. The manufacturer estimates the system can save operators up to \$14 per day in fuel costs, when compared to complex central hydraulic systems. *HendersonProducts.com*

## Campbell Scientific

The GMON3 Snow Water Equivalency (SWE) sensor obtains a measurement by monitoring gamma rays that are naturally emitted from the ground. As snow accumulates on top of the ground, it measures an attenuation of the normal background radiation levels. The higher the water content, the higher the attenuation of the gamma radiation. The sensor measures with an accuracy of  $\pm 15$  mm from 0 to 300 mm, and  $\pm 15\%$  from 300 to 600 mm, operating within temperatures from  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The GMON3 can output an RS-232 signal interface to Campbell Scientific dataloggers or other recording devices. It is effective with any type of snow or ice. Data can be transmitted in near real-time with the addition of a wireless communication option.

*CampbellSci.com/gmon3*



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## The Boss

To meet growing demand from off-road vehicle owners, The Boss Snowplow UTV Plows are available for a wider selection of popular UTV brands, including Bobcat, Case IH, Club Car, Honda, Husqvarna and New Holland. They join John Deere, Kawasaki, Kubota, and Polaris for The Boss' growing UTV plow lineup. Two models are available: The 6.5-ft. Power-V XT and the 6-ft. Poly Straight-Blade Snowplow (pictured). Both offer Smart Technology features and high-performance

hydraulic systems, making snow removal easier, faster and more efficient. The hydraulic pumps are fully enclosed to protect against corrosion and hydraulic freeze-up for enhanced durability. Operation of the hydraulic and electrical system is done with the touch of a button from inside the cab, making lifting, lowering and angling the snowplow fast and easy. *BossPlow.com*

## Legacy Building Solutions

Combining rigid frame engineering with the proven benefits of tension fabric, Legacy introduces the industry's first line of fabric buildings to incorporate structural steel beams instead of open web trusses. This new engineering concept provides a cost-effective, long-lasting solution for salt and sand storage facilities.

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**ClearSpan Fabric Structures**

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**Ditch Witch**

The ultra-compact, ultra-powerful SK350 compact tool carrier features a 20-hp Kohler engine and an 11 gpm dual hydrostatic ground drive that gives it the same capabilities of larger compact loaders. With the SK350's comfortable stand-on platform, freeing you from trudging through mud and debris and over uneven terrain, you'll

be better able to witness how productive this rubber track loader can be. The SK350 also has a powerful auxiliary circuit flow to enable the unit to run more than 70 compact utility attachments at full power. [DitchWitch.com/compact-utility/compact-tool-carriers/SK350](http://DitchWitch.com/compact-utility/compact-tool-carriers/SK350)

**Cargill**

Cargill Diamond Crystal GreenMelt Blended Ice Melter now works down to -5° F. It's green-tinted for easy-to-see coverage on ice and packed snow. The commercial-strength blend includes fast-acting calcium chloride and extended action sodium chloride for an economical one-two punch. It's commercially balanced to give sidewalk and parking lot crews a critical 20-minute jumpstart from its calcium chloride, coupled with more than 60 minutes of extended melting action from its sodium chloride. [Cargill.com](http://Cargill.com)

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**Bobcat**

With five blade configurations, the snow V-blade attachment from Bobcat can be positioned in multiple ways for maximum attachment versatility. Position the blade in a V-configuration to clear a path and plow through deep snow or use it as a scoop blade to scoop, push or pile snow. You can also use it as a straight blade to pile large amounts of snow and as an angle blade to push snow right or left. Applications for the snow V-blade attachment include clearing deep snow from pavement. Other applications include pushing snow and ice, scooping and piling snow, and plowing through deep drifts.

[Bobcat.com/attachments/snow\\_v-blade](http://Bobcat.com/attachments/snow_v-blade)





## Ariens

The professional 36 Sno-Thro, which comes equipped with a 342cc Ariens Polar Force engine by Briggs & Stratton, easily removes snow from sidewalks and large areas with a 36-in. clearing width. The all-steel, 16-in. serrated auger and three-blade, 14-in. steel impeller enhance clearing ability. A 50-ft. discharge range ensures snow lands outside the clearing path. Automatic traction control optimizes maneuverability, and with no levers or triggers, steering is effortless. The Sno-Thro also features a 120v electric start with recoil backup, a 3.2-qt. fuel capacity, a forward speed of 6 mph and a reverse speed of 2 mph. Additional features include a 200°, Quick-Turn remote chute control; high-wear, reversible skid shoes and drift cutters to enhance power and performance; hand warmers; a halogen headlight; and a clean-out tool with a brush. *Ariens.com*



Sno Broom



Sno Blade



Sno Blower

## Pro-Tech Manufacturing and Distribution

Pro-Tech now allows customers to purchase its latest line of products — the Sno Blade, Sno Blower and Sno Broom attachments — directly from its website. Online purchases are offered with free freight within the United States, and products are shipped directly to the customer. The new system lets snow and ice management professionals check availability before ordering, and as long as a product is in stock, it will ship within 10 business days. Pro-Tech representatives will call customers to let them know when their orders have shipped, and their freight partners will call to confirm delivery. Pro-Tech plans to have the rest of its product line available for online purchasing this summer. Sales tax applies only to those taking delivery in the state of New York. *ProTechCorp.com*

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### Crysteel Manufacturing

Featuring a two-year warranty, Crysteel's corrosion-resistant, Stainless Steel Tailgate Spreader is designed to effectively spread de-icing materials while meeting the highest demands for efficiency and dependability all winter long. An industry exclusive and patent-pending fully tapered trough eliminates all flat surfaces, preventing material hang-ups. Available with a 6- or 9-in. auger, the tailgate spreader also features a full opening bottom trough hinged on the body side for easy accessibility and cleanout. The direct-drive design minimizes maintenance and allows independent control of the auger and spinner. [Crysteel.com](http://Crysteel.com)

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### Honda

The HS928 series snowblower is intended for aggressive snow clearing in demanding environments and is available in wheel-driven and dual-track, self-propelled models. Its enhanced design enables a 28-in. clearing width and a discharge distance as long as 49 ft. The series (HS928WA, HS928WAS, HS928TA and HS928TAS), which is powered by a high-torque Honda GX270 OHV engine, also offers a choice of manual or electric starting. [Honda.com](http://Honda.com)



### SnowEx

Electrically powered, the new SL-80 and SL-80SS push sprayers are designed for ice management on sidewalks and other small areas. Available with a powder-coated steel frame (SL-80) or stainless steel frame (SL-80SS), both sprayers have a 13-gal., corrosion-resistant polyethylene tank. Each model includes an adjustable-height boomless nozzle, which sprays most salt brine and liquid ice melters up to 48 in. wide. The units also come with an adjustable spray wand for spot-spraying applications. A 12-volt electric pump and rechargeable battery powers the SL-80 and SL-80SS. The pump is rated at 2 gpm at 60 psi. Other standard features include inline filtration in the tank and large pneumatic tires for easy pushing over snow and ice. The sprayers are covered by a two-year limited warranty. [Trynxfactory.com](http://Trynxfactory.com)





## 10 best practices for a new reality

I have spent the better part of the first quarter in an airplane, traveling the country meeting with contractors. I'm happy to report there's good news out there: Prospects for recovery look better than they have in a long time.

Contractors I have talked to are increasingly upbeat. They have been able to maintain a positive, proactive attitude even during tough times.

So, how did they do it? They balanced cautious optimism with careful planning and embraced change. When they pushed their "reset buttons" two things happened: They ended up healthier and leaner in their revitalized state and their collective team spirit became stronger than ever.

In transitioning from downsizing to recovery, the following best practices will help *you* push the reset button and align your company with shifting expectations for the new economy:

**1 Refine estimating.** Invest time and energy in analyzing how you estimate. Revise production rates; develop comparative square footage rates and a more detailed process that will help you estimate with greater precision. Upgrade or invest in software programs that will make estimating more precise and efficient.

**2 Eliminate costs.** Take a hard look at overhead, and eliminate some costs both for salaries and other expenditures.

**3 Rethink traditional marketing.** Consider newer ways to market your business. Discover how to use social media as part of an integrated program to attract and engage quality customers. Is your message still fresh? Does it resonate?

**4 Reconsider what keeps you interested.** Join a peer group. Benchmark costs and margins and connect with other contractors from non-competing markets to share best practices. I facilitate four peer groups, and a fifth is being formed as I write this. This has been a powerful tool for owners to energize their companies and stay interested, relevant and connected.

**5 Invest in bench strength.** Hire interns and new graduates from horticulture and landscape architecture programs. Invest in recruiting strategic new hires. Develop next-generation leaders from within.

**6 Go green.** Incorporate sustainability into your service offerings. Water savings, resource conservation and irrigation management are good places to start. Some companies incorporate rainwater harvesting, bioswales, green walls, roof gardens, LEED certification, organic compost teas and other sustainable practices to become leaders in their markets. Consider investing in cleaner-burning fuels to power your fleet and field equipment, and learn the benefits that sustainability brings to your customers' bottom lines.

**7 Upgrade equipment.** Stand-on mowers, for example, are becoming an industry staple for mowing, replacing the walk-behind mower. They are faster, more maneuverable and have a smaller footprint in the trailer or on the truck bed.

**8 Manage cash flow.** Be more aware of your balance sheet. Manage cash better and use debt carefully.

**9 Outsource fleet maintenance.** Using a third party like Enterprise Fleet is an efficient way to do preventative maintenance; it lowers maintenance costs and makes shops easier to manage.

**10 Eliminate waste.** Become technologically proficient. Incorporate paperless technology for time tracking and eliminate paper timecards. This is more accurate and efficient. Invest in mobile technologies and practical, real-time applications that will enhance your productivity.

The Green Industry is resilient, and the people and companies in it have taken bold, courageous steps to forge ahead. The positive spirit, value system and work ethic that united us in difficult times will sustain us into the future.

I see many good companies in our industry poised for great growth in the not-too-distant future.

# WEEDWATCH

STANDING SENTINEL TO PROTECT PLANT HEALTH



Recommended  
Dow AgroSciences  
solution  
**Turflon® Ester Ultra**  
specialty  
herbicide

## CHICORY

*Cichorium intybus*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This summer perennial develops from a basal rosette. While it looks similar to dandelion in the rosette form, its leaf lobes are not opposite.
- ▶ Bright blue to purple, square-toothed flowers form on stems that can grow up to 3 ft. tall. When cut, stems produce a milky liquid.
- ▶ Each plant can produce up to 3,000 seeds from June through September.

▶ It is most troublesome in disturbed areas and thrives in thinner turf, but it can be found in newly established turf.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Properly mow, water and fertilize lawn to encourage healthy turfgrass growth, and inhibit the spread of chicory.
- ▶ When chicory is in the rosette stage, apply a systemic post-emergent herbicide, labeled for chicory control and your use site.



Recommended  
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solution  
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herbicide\*

## DANDELION

*Taraxacum officinale*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This perennial grows all summer in moist conditions and soils, but thrives in weak, thin turf.
- ▶ Bright yellow blossoms have many petals, followed by puffball seed carriers.
- ▶ Long, hairless leaves have jagged teeth growing from a low rosette.
- ▶ Leafless, hollow stems emit a white milky sap when broken.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ A post-emergent application of two-, three- or four-way broadleaf herbicides is most effective in spring or fall.
- ▶ Properly mow, water and fertilize lawn to encourage healthy turf growth and minimize thin turf.

\* Confront is not for sale or use in Nassau and Suffolk counties, New York. State restrictions on the sale and use of Confront and Turflon Ester Ultra apply.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit [www.DowProvesIt.com](http://www.DowProvesIt.com) or call 800/255-3726.

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