

**Town of Bellingham
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

**Snow and Ice Control
FAQs**

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Can I push snow from my property onto the sidewalk or street?

A. NO.

Bylaw 15.02 restricts this act and you can be fined. Understand that the property owner is responsible for the actions of a contractor you may hire to plow your driveway. Additionally, such action may bring liability if an accident should occur.

Article 15.02. Snow Removal Operations

No resident shall permit or cause snow to be pushed on, pushed over or placed across a Public Way or sidewalk. The penalty for violating Article 15.02 is the responsibility of the resident.

Article 1.04. General Penalty For Violation Of By-Laws

Whoever violates any of the provisions of these By-Laws whereby any act or thing is enjoined or prohibited, shall, unless another provision is expressly made, forfeit and pay a fine not exceeding three hundred dollars (\$300) for each violation, each day representing an independent violation.

Q. Who determines the opening, closing or delayed opening of school during snow and ice storms?

A. The School Superintendent.

The Superintendent typically checks in with the Police for current road conditions and the DPW for status of school access roads and parking lots, monitors TV weather and reviews on line information. The Superintendent also receives the special storm forecast information sent to the DPW.

Q. Is it a big deal when the media reports that cities or towns have spent their snow budget and will that affect the conditions of the roads?

A. NO – Not in Bellingham.

Budget concerns have never affected how we fight a winter storm.

We and all cities and towns in Massachusetts budget a low estimated amount for snow and ice control. When the budgeted funds are about to be exceeded, the DPW sends a memo to the Selectmen and Finance Committee requesting permission for emergency spending and votes are taken to approve the request. At the end of the fiscal year, (May

town meeting) the funds are transferred into the Snow and Ice budget. Our Chief Finance Officer holds sufficient funds in reserve to cover an anticipated May transfer.

Although this sounds like a crazy approach, it is the only thing that makes sense within the requirements of municipal finance. No one can predict how bad any winter season will be, so why tie up funds by appropriating a big number for Snow and Ice. If we did that, we could have a large chunk of funds that could not be used for anything else.

Q. Do some streets receive priority during a snow storm?

A. YES.

Major roadways are the top priority followed by side street hills.

Q. Does the Town really need a parking ban?

A. YES.

Snowplowing and removal are difficult; parked cars on the roadways not only increase the number of hazards, but also the time it takes to remove the snow.

Article 16.01. DPW Director Authorized To Remove Vehicles Hindering Snow Removal

The DPW Director may, for the purpose of snow removal, plowing snow, or removing ice, from any way, remove or cause to be removed to some convenient place including in such term a public garage, any vehicle interfering with such work, and impose liability for the cost of such removal, and of the storage charges, if any, resulting there from, upon the owner of the vehicle.

Q. Do sidewalks receive the same priority as streets?

A. NO.

The roads are always plowed first. Only certain sidewalks are plowed when the storm has ended. Sidewalks considered to be school critical and along mains road are plowed when we have sufficiently rested staff available. Sidewalks on side streets are not plowed.

Q. Why is snow pushed into my driveway?

A. The situation is unavoidable.

The plows remove the snow from curb to curb for maximum clearance of the roadway. This provides for maximum drainage, public safety and prepares us for the next potential storm. Understand that if you plow your driveway before the road is plowed to the curb line, a new windrow of snow will get pushed in front of your driveway.

Q. Will trash and recyclables be collected during a snow storm?

A. Typically YES, but our curbside collection contractor will at times postpone pick up.

Unfortunately, this is generally a last minute call on their part making it difficult to inform our residents. You are best to use common sense. It is also wise to try to be ready for a situation where you can hold your trash for two weeks. When putting out your trash, try to place it so that it will not hinder the street plows or sidewalk plows.

Q. Is there anything that I can do as a motorist to help with the snow and ice control.

A. If at all possible, stay off the road, especially during peak travel times.

You are safest in your home. If you are home, you are not on the roads and that allows us the best chance to stay ahead of the storm.

We have a small fleet of trucks and need to plow and treat about 200 miles of roadway travel lanes. It snows on all 200 lanes at once. Our trucks have no special abilities. If there is a big back up on our main roads, which is not uncommon if a storm hits or intensifies during peak commuter times, our trucks are simply stuck in traffic like everyone else. As can be heard over our two-way radios "I am on XYZ Street in the parade!" Fewer cars on the road equals better traffic flow, which means our plows and salt trucks, can do their job.

Q. Is there anything that I can do as a resident to help with the snow and ice control.

A. As with driving, stay off and away from the road. If you live in an area where there are no curbs, mailboxes, or other curb line identifiers, consider putting up some form of marker.

Our drivers (town and private) do not have super hero vision. In the middle of the night, on snow covered roads, the curb line is not clearly visible. We need to push back to the curb line; we do not want to plow up lawns or shoulders, but it happens with no malicious intent.

Help us by cleaning snow from catch basins and hydrants.

Q. Does the DPW clear snow from catch basins or hydrants?

A. NO.

We simply do not have the staff to clear snow from our over 700 hydrants and 2,200 catch basins.

During winter months, fire hydrants should be kept free and clear of snow and ice. Easy access to hydrants ensures the safety of your neighborhood in the event of an emergency. If you have a hydrant in front of your house, please take a few minutes and clear the area around it. The few minutes you take could make the difference if a fire breaks out in your neighborhood.

Keeping catch basins clear of snow and ice will reduce the possibility of street flooding during heavy rains or snow melting periods. We try to plow all the way back to the curb

but this is not always achieved to an ideal extent. Also, some catch basins sit back behind the curb line. You know better than we do where the basins are near your home. If you can do a little shoveling to expose even a portion of the basin, water flow will be much better.

It is best to clean snow from hydrants and catch basin after the street has been completely plowed.

Q. What should I do if my vehicle is damaged if I drive through a pothole?

A. You can put in a claim for damages, but it is very unlikely that you will get any compensation. Claims should be directed to the DPW in writing.

State Law effectively admits that potholes are a typical road hazard in Massachusetts and the motorist must take that into consideration when driving.

Massachusetts General Law (M.G.L.), Chapter 84, Section 15, states that a municipality cannot be considered negligent or legally liable for damages that occur as a result of the defect in the public way, unless it had prior notice that a defect existed and failed to repair in within a reasonable amount of time. Further, under M.G.L. Chapter 84, Section 15, the liability of cities and towns is limited to those cases where the defect was the sole proximate cause of injury or damage. Finally, if the actions of the individual or some third party contribute in any way to the occurrence, recovery against the city is barred.

Police patrol cars and DPW vehicles that travel the Town's roads report potholes to the DPW office via the two-way radio system. When a report is received, a crew is immediately dispatched to that location to correct the condition; therefore, it is unlikely that our insurance carrier will pay a claim for pothole damage.

Q. What should I do if my vehicle is damaged by a Town snow plow or salt spreader?

A. You should treat this like any vehicle accident. Exchange information with the other driver. It is never a bad idea to contact the Police, and they should be called if anyone is hurt or if either vehicle is severely damaged or needs to be towed.

Just like private vehicle owners, the Town sends vehicle accident claims to our insurance company. We do not make direct payment to individuals claiming damage.

Private plow trucks hired by the Town have their own auto insurance. We confirm that they have the basic insurance and are driving a registered vehicle when they apply for snow plowing. The Town accepts no liability for accidents they are involved in while working to clear Town streets.

Q. How hard is it for a private plow truck to get assigned a route in Bellingham?

A. Not hard but it takes some patience.

If you put your name in, it can take three or more years before you get assigned a route, but once you get a route, you will keep it if you do a good job plowing it.

We call in 33 private trucks for any storm with accumulation of over four inches. The private trucks plow their assigned route and are given the same route storm after storm and year after year.

A new private truck that comes in gets placed on our “Subs” list. Subs are not assigned a route but can get called to fill the gap when a route’s plow truck breaks down. Our subs list has been long the last few years with as many as ten on it. Our turn over is generally only about five per year.

Snow plow truck (Vendor) applications are available at the DPW office annually around the first of November.

If you have any other questions, contact the DPW at 508-966-5816 or email the Director at ddimartino@bellinghamma.org.

The DPW Snow and Ice Procedure is posted on the web at:
http://www.bellinghamma.org/Pages/BellinghamMA_DPW/Snow&IceProFY2010.pdf

Have a Safe Winter!