

Snow and Ice Clearance

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Even a short spell of ground snow or air frost can create dangerous conditions for staff and **visitors. It's part of a business's duty of care to** reduce the risk of slips and falls during cold weather.



Introduction

The risk of slips and trips generally increases during the Autumn and Winter months. Reasons include less daylight hours, contamination from wet leaves, snow and ice. There are an average of 26.2 days a year when there is snow on the ground in Scotland, and around 15.6 days in the rest of the UK. Meteorologists consider a frost to be when the temperature falls below 0°C. To get frost or ice forming on surfaces you need to have a combination of low temperatures and moisture either in the air as vapour, or on the ground as liquid water (Ref: Met Office).

Owners, employers and occupiers have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 and the Occupiers Liability Acts.

Amongst the common weather-related questions Aviva receive as insurers, the prevention of liability claims due to the presence of snow and ice is high on the list. This document is intended to help answer that question and provide guidance on what to do and how to prevent incidents and claims.



Identifying areas of concern

Review the workplace, including all internal and external areas where pedestrians and vehicles frequent. Common high-risk areas include:

- Access and egress points from the premises
- Car parks
- External pedestrian walkways
- External smoking shelters
- Slopes and steps/stairs
- Vehicle roadways
- Waste disposal areas

Also consider the potential for blocked/overflowing drains and soakaways, leaking roofs and guttering, uneven surfaces/potholes that may give rise to puddles forming which may lead to an increase in ice formation during cold weather.

Winter planning and risk assessment

Develop and implement a documented winter maintenance strategy and undertake risk assessments to identify areas of high risk and how they will be managed. Ensure that employees and third parties have clearly defined responsibilities and the necessary equipment to undertake snow and ice clearance tasks. Implement procedures for minimising the risk of icy surfaces forming and how to keep pedestrians safe.

Consider priorities – is it feasible to grit and maintain all areas or should high priority areas be identified, e.g. safe access and egress from the site/premises? Would it be wise to close some car parking areas or entrances to focus management on key areas and high footfall paths?

Preparing for cold weather

Tips to minimise preventable icy surfaces forming include:

- Good facilities maintenance standards – repair leaks to gutters, roofing, clear blocked drains and gulleys and potholes
- Review standards of handrails and slopes, steps and stairs
- Consider canopies over walkways
- Stock up with winter maintenance equipment, gritting and rock salt (plain and treated)
- Communicate to employees about impending snow and icy conditions and give advice
- Step up accident, near miss and hazard reporting communication and monitoring
- Keep a watchful eye on weather forecasts
- Provision of additional matting at entrances to prevent contamination being trafficked into buildings and causing a slip hazard

Gritting and snow clearance

Whenever frost, snow or ice is forecast or temperatures predicted to fall close to or below freezing, gritting should be carried out. Salt creates an impurity in the water that lowers its freezing point below zero. It is more effective at preventing ice forming than melting ice, a common misconception. Salt is very effective down to around -9°C. In snow it is less effective as beyond around 40mm in depth the snow tends to dilute the salt too much and it becomes ineffective. Snow is therefore normally cleared by other methods once it has fallen.

Consideration should also be given to potential environmental impacts through salt run-off into nearby water courses. **Don't over grit, it doesn't always mean better results. Accurate weather forecasting and road/ground** temperature forecasts can help with this alongside effective training of employees to prevent excessive salt spreading.

Perception of employees and third parties can also play a role in the choice of salt used, for example pink salt is more visible and gives the perception that the company has a pro-active approach and are seen to be taking action.

Protect employees who are undertaking gritting tasks by providing warm clothing and appropriate slip-resistant footwear, see [Health and Safety Laboratory GRIP Rating Scheme](#).

Why do claims succeed?

For a claim to succeed, the injured party would have to prove that the owner or occupier of the land/property had been negligent in fulfilling their duty of care toward that individual.

As a private individual/householder, Ministers have repeatedly welcomed 'public-spiritedness' and said, 'common sense' and 'benefit of the doubt' should always prevail when considering litigation. A court would have to deem someone as having been 'wholly incompetent or irresponsible' for another to successfully sue them for injury.

The situation for employers is a little different and there is an expectation of a higher duty of care. Legal opinion is that 'employers need to be mindful of identifying areas most likely to be affected by snow and ice, and to put into practice an 'appropriate' policy to ensure they can demonstrate that they have an appropriate system'.

Improving claims defence

There's very little definition on what constitutes an acceptable level of compliance. The best practice is for companies to have a formal plan for ice and snow clearance. They should also have a record of when clearance has been completed, with specified times and dates, along with a written plan. Both these documents will be an essential part of any defence should there be a claim of negligence.

Key considerations

- Review the areas around your premises
- Risk assess those areas to decide where there is the greatest risk of a slipping or falling incident
- Produce a plan of what is to be cleared
- Provide suitable equipment and material for the snow and ice clearing
- Ensure relevant staff are trained in what needs to be cleared and how to clear it. Include where cleared snow is going to be put, so that it doesn't cause any additional risks such as blocking paths or drains.
- Ensure trained staff are available for clearance duties when needed. If snow is forecast, the relevant areas need to be gritted before the premises are occupied and, where possible, in advance of the snow falling or **ice forming**. Remember, it's easier to remove fresh or loose snow, so plan to clear snow as soon as possible before it becomes compacted

Checklist

A generic Snow and Ice Clearance Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

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For more information please visit:

[Aviva Risk Management Solutions – Specialist Partners](#)

Sources and Useful Links

- [Salt Association: Best Practices – De-icing](#)
- [HSE: Icy Conditions and Winter Weather](#)
- [Institute of Highway Engineers: Winter Maintenance Handbook](#)

Additional Information

Relevant Loss Prevention Standards include:

- Prevention of Trips
- Slip Prevention

To find out more, please visit [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#) or speak to one of our advisors.

Email us at riskadvice@aviva.com or call 0345 366 6666.*

*Calls may be recorded and/or monitored for our joint protection.

Appendix 1 – Snow and Ice Clearance Checklist



Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Snow and Ice Clearance	Y/N	Comments
1.	Has a responsible person been appointed for managing the process of snow and ice clearance?		
2.	Have you produced a formal written plan (including a specific risk assessment) of what is to be cleared and when, and is this documentation regularly reviewed? Has this been communicated to all relevant individuals? <i>Providing a site plan coloured to show priority can be helpful.</i>		
3.	Does the snow and ice clearance assessment include both those who carry out the clearance as well as those individuals who may fall if snow and ice isn't cleared ?		
4.	Does your formal written plan include arrangements for checking the weather in advance, so that individuals can be on stand-by if clearance is required?		
5.	Have all individuals been made aware of the areas that will be kept clear and those which won't ? <i>Ensure that any warnings are provided to employees and visitors.</i>		
6.	Have you decided how the designated areas are to be cleared and what materials and equipment will be required?		
7.	Have those individuals responsible for the clearance of snow and ice been provided with appropriate training, overclothing, gloves, footwear and equipment?		

LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

	Snow and Ice Clearance Contd.	Y/N	Comments
8.	If you provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) specifically for protection against adverse weather, are procedures in place to ensure it remains fit for purpose?		
9.	Have you got sufficient stocks of appropriate materials/equipment prior to the start of the cold season?		
10.	Are there arrangements for checking supplies and maintaining equipment throughout the cold period?		
11.	If using contractors to undertake snow and ice clearance, have they been through a suitable evaluation process, including checks on their insurance?		
12.	Do you ask contractors to provide copies of their own risk assessments and method statements?		
13.	Do you communicate to staff the need to wear suitable clothing and footwear during periods of cold weather?		
14.	Do you check the snow and ice clearance plan during the cold period to ensure it is effectively clearing the areas of highest risk?		
15.	Do you retain records of what clearance has been carried out, when it was carried out, and by whom?		
16.	If there are any slip or fall incidents during cold periods, do you ensure that you follow your normal accident/incident reporting procedures, including retaining relevant CCTV images?		
17.	Additional comments:		

LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

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