



# Snow Removal Frequently Asked Questions



## What happens when it starts to snow?

The City of Allentown subscribes to an advanced weather forecasting service. When a storm alert is issued, we apply a salt brine solution to 80 miles of our main roadways. Once the storm warning is issued, depending upon the timing and nature of the pending storm, crews are brought in and put on stand-by. Once the storm starts, salt trucks are sent out on designated salt routes to apply salt as necessary. Main routes are completed first, then secondary (residential areas) and then the smaller streets and alleys.

## How is a Snow Emergency declared?

The Director of Public Works, in conjunction with the Street Superintendent, Police Chief and Director of Community Development or their alternates, determines that a Snow Emergency exists and reports same to the Mayor.

## Once the Snow Emergency has been declared how long do we have to remove our vehicles?

Under City Codified Ordinances, Part 5, Title 3-Traffic Regulations, Article 527.02: The Snow Emergency shall go into effect four (4) hours after declaration. A Snow Emergency can only be declared between 7:00 A.M. AND 11:00 P.M. Please note that the City and surrounding municipalities do not always declare snow emergencies at the same time. Check with your local news media or on the city's website ([www.allentownpa.gov](http://www.allentownpa.gov)) to see if the City of Allentown has called a snow emergency

## When I called the Street Department to find out about road conditions, the line was busy.

Our telephone lines are understandably busy during severe weather conditions. We advise limiting your travel, or staying off the roads entirely if possible. Listen to television and radio bulletins about road conditions.

Remember that we can only provide information about streets within the City of Allentown. Our phone lines should be used primarily to alert us if a street has been missed or if there is some special problem relating to the snow removal operations. Please do not call for missed Alleys until 24-hrs after the snow event has ended.

Please check the snow hotline at **610-437-7669** to see which areas we are currently working in. The hotline message is updated throughout the storm.

## Whom do I contact in cases of Snow Plow Damage?

Please contact the City of Allentown's Risk Management Department at **610-437-7619**. Please note that there are also private contractors and citizens who drive around with plows on their vehicles. All City vehicles are clearly marked with the City's emblem along with that vehicles department and vehicle number

## Who removes the snow from sidewalks?

Under City Codified Ordinance 711.05: all persons owning, controlling or occupying any private property, premises, lot or tract of land adjoining or front upon any of the streets of the City shall remove snow and ice from the sidewalk area or footway of such premises within ten (10) hours after it shall have ceased snowing, sleeting or raining. It shall be considered compliance with this section if a cleared portion three (3') feet in width shall have been made upon such sidewalk or footpath. Clear sidewalks are essential for many citizens especially those with disabilities, people who enjoy walking as form of exercise and children who walk to and from school. Snow covered sidewalks increase the likelihood of slip and fall accidents. Questions regarding un-shoveled sidewalks can be directed to the City of Allentown's Engineering Department at **610-437- 7596**.



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## **What if I am unable to clear the snow from my sidewalk or driveway because of age or disability?**

Unfortunately, snow removal services are not available from the City. Currently the City does coordinate with the Lehigh County Senior Center to help Senior citizen in need of assistance clearing snow from their sidewalks. The Lehigh County Senior Center can be reached at **610-437-3700**.

## **Can I throw the snow in the street when I shovel out my car or my sidewalk/driveway area?**

Under City Codified Ordinances, Part 5, Title 3-Traffic Regulations, Article 527.06: Shoveling snow into public streets from vehicles and private driveways is strictly prohibited and against the law. It only makes the situation worse for everyone. The police department may issue citations for this behavior.

## **Who is responsible for the clearing of handicapped ramps?**

The abutting property owner is responsible to clean the handicapped ramp to make safe passage to the roadway pavement.

## **I have a medical condition. Can you plow my street in case there is an emergency and an ambulance needs to get through?**

The POTENTIAL for a medical emergency does not warrant priority treatment. Anyone needing an ambulance in a medical emergency should contact **911** where all necessary steps will be coordinated.

Utilize **911** only in life threatening emergencies or for emergency Fire and Rescue services. If you need help, but it's not an emergency, please contact the Police Non-Emergency Number at **610-437-7751**.

## **Why do the plows always push snow into my driveway?**

For a resident this can be quite annoying, but unfortunately it cannot be helped. The snow must, at minimum, be removed from the traveled portion of the road but our plow drivers are requested to plow curb to curb where possible. When the City receives a heavy snowfall, if possible, do not shovel your driveway until after the plow has gone by. If you must shovel do not throw the snow out onto the roadway as you may create a hazard for another vehicle, and if an accident were to occur you might be held liable.

## **Why don't you clean my driveway?**

The City does not clean driveways for two (2) reasons:

1. There are thousands of driveways in the City. The task to complete and the cost to clean all the driveways each snow event would be insurmountable.
2. The liability to the City for damage to the driveway approaches is cost prohibitive.

## **I only have on-street parking. Why do you always plow snow against my car?**

The City must remove the snow from the traveled portion of the road. On two-way streets where there is only parking on one side, the plow operator cannot push the snow away from the parked cars into the oncoming traffic, as it would create a hazard and liability. Snow is always pushed away from the oncoming traffic. When heavy snowfalls are predicted, residents are asked where possible not to park on the roads. This is done to reduce the chance of plowing in parked vehicles, eliminating the chance of damaging vehicles and allowing for a more efficient plowing operation.



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## **Why does the plow not remove all of the snow from my road?**

The plows are designed to ride on "guides" (shoes) that raise the blade approximately 3/8 inch from the surface of the roadway. This is done to prevent damage to both the vehicle and infrastructure from raised manholes, catch basins or water valves. When plowing, our goal is to make residential streets passable; not to clear them to the bare pavement. Once the street has been plowed and salted, the interaction of the salt and vehicular traffic is required to melt the remaining snow cover. Streets with low traffic volumes will therefore remain snow covered longer.

## **I live in a cul-de-sac, can we pile our snow in the middle of the circle?**

No. Piling the snow in the middle of the circle will not get the cul-de-sac removed any quicker and will lead to icy patches when the snow melts during the day and refreezes as temperatures drop overnight. It will also create a hazardous condition when the city plows come through in subsequent storms as the drivers cannot see if children are playing in the snow pile.

## **How do you decide what streets are on these main salt routes?**

The main salt routes are comprised of arterial roads and collector roads, as defined by traffic volumes, fire/hospital emergency routes and LANTA transit bus routes.

## **Why do I never see a salt truck when it snows?**

The City of Allentown has over 430 miles of main's, secondaries and alleys. The City's main salt routes are maintained by upwards of 20 vehicles. Assistance is given by our water, sewer, parks, recycling and watershed departments in our secondary areas as required.

Depending upon the time of day, traffic volumes and snowfall amounts, the average main routes can take between 4 and 6 hours to complete one (1) pass. Plowing operations will require 12 to 24 hours after the end of the storm depending on snow amount totals. The trucks will continue back over these main routes until the storm has stopped and these streets are clear of snow or ice.

## **I once saw a snow plow parked in a restaurant parking lot during a bad snowstorm. Why was it there instead of on the streets working?**

The City of Allentown's plow operators take pride in clearing the streets on their routes as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Common sense and good safety practices dictate that each driver should take a 15-minute break every three hours; drivers also receive a 30-minute lunch break during their 12-hour shift.

It is dangerous, both for the snowplow driver and the public, if a fatigued driver is behind the wheel of a snowplow. It is in the best interest of the all concerned for the drivers to take occasional breaks.

## **Why do you not use sand for winter control?**

Salt is a very effective de-icing agent and is effective to temperatures as low as -12°C (10°F). Once temperatures are 20°F and falling we pre-treat our salt with Calcium Chloride to increase the effectiveness of the melting process. Sand has no de-icing properties. Sand is an abrasive substance and is used to increase traction for vehicles. The City will at times use a mixture of salt and anti-skid for icy conditions on our secondary, smaller streets and alleys. However, cleanup of sand from roadways and sewers throughout the municipality proves cost prohibitive.



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## **How much does the City spend on winter control annually?**

The Public Works Department spends anywhere from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 a year. In 2010 the Streets Department spent \$920,166. We used over 6,911 tons of de-icing materials and applied more than 105,580 gallons of liquid anti-icing materials.

## **Streets Department**

Regular Office Hours: 7:00 a.m - 3:30 pm.

Snow Operation Hours: 24 hours

**Phone:** For general information during a snow storm, call 610-437-7669

**Website:** [www.allentownpa.gov](http://www.allentownpa.gov)

*Revised January 2012*