



Shoveling Snow Best Practices

Toolbox Talk Lesson Plan

Shoveling snow is a lot of work, and it is easy to injure yourself if you are not using the right technique. On average 1,200 people die as a result of shoveling snow each year.. Add heart attacks and back / shoulder injuries and slips and falls, and snow shoveling is one of the most dangerous activities people can attempt.

"**Warming up**" is not about body temperature, but is a way of using slow, gentle exercise to increase blood flow and flexibility to the muscles and joints that will be used. Professional athletes know the importance of warming up. Let's learn from them and warm-up before shoveling tons of snow.

Tips for Safe Snow Shoveling

- **Dress appropriately.** Wearing layers will allow you to adjust to the temperature outside. Be sure to dress warmly enough and cover your head, face and hands when outside for prolonged periods of time. If you become overheated, take a break from shoveling.
- **Pick the right waterproof boots.** They will want to protect their feet from the cold as well as keep them dry. Wear non-skid boots to guard against falls on slick snow or hidden ice.
- **Pick a small shovel.** Depending on how wet the snow is; a shovel full of snow can weigh up to 15 pounds! Selecting a smaller shovel means lighter loads of snow which can help prevent injury to the body by creating less strain. An ergonomic snow shovel with a curved handle or an adjustable handle length will minimize painful bending in snow removal chores. Use a silicone lubricant on the shovel. This will help the snow slide off easier.
- **Stay hydrated.** Water plays an important role when people exercise, even in winter. Carry a water bottle and take a few sips after every 15 minutes of shoveling snow.
- **Shovel frequently.** Shovel every time the snow fall is about 2 inches. This will help lessen the load and make snow shoveling more manageable. In deep snow, remove a few inches at a time, rather than attempting to shovel the full depth at once
- **Use the big muscles of the legs and not the back.** Make sure that your knees are bending and straightening to lift the shovel instead of leaning forward and straightening back up with the back. Avoid twisting the back to move snow to its new location – always pivot your whole body to face the new direction
- **Push the snow.** It's easier to push the shovel full of snow to a good location instead of lifting and throwing the shovel full of snow.
- **Separate the hands on the shovel.** Keep your hands about 12 inches apart to increase your leverage and provide greater stability and minimize the chances of injuring your lower back.
- **Avoid caffeine & nicotine before shoveling.** Caffeine and nicotine act as stimulants by increasing the heart rate and constricting blood vessels which puts more strain on the heart.
- **Set a time limit.** Shoveling snow is a hard work. You may be shoveling for up to an hour or more. When feasible, come inside after 20-30 minutes and start again.
- **Most importantly,** listen to your body. Stop if you feel pain, and let someone know.

*This lesson plan is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization's policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this bulletin, please contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046. **Presenters should attach sign-in sheet to this lesson plan.***