



A weekly question/answer column

Do You Have Tips For Safely Removing Snow From Sidewalks and Driveways?

Richard Beard answers:*

Hand injuries, muscle strain, and overexertion are just some of the snow removal injuries associated with each season's first major snowfall. As winter arrives and snow blankets the walkways and driveways, here are some tips to help you remove it.

- Dress properly and pay close attention to the cold temperature and how tired you become. Clothes should be snug fitting and worn in layers. Shoes should be sturdy and provide traction on icy surfaces. Don't work to the point of exhaustion and take frequent rests indoors to warm up.
- Snow shoveling, although labor intensive, is the method most commonly used by homeowners. The shovel does not require an operator's manual, seldom fails to start, and will work when other equipment will not. Lightweight, aluminum shovels work best and surface conditioners such as Teflon, silicon, or wax can be used to prevent snow buildup on the shovel surface. A typical snow shovel holds lots of snow, but partially filling the shovel rather than heaping it full will reduce strain on muscles and joints.
- Powered snow removal equipment can seriously injure people and animals, and cause damage to property from flying debris. The equipment produces toxic exhaust fumes and operates on fuel that presents a fire and explosion hazard. Eye protection is also important and wear hearing protection if the engine noise is excessive or the equipment will be operated for long periods of time.
- Please remember the following guidelines for safe snow removal with a snow blower. Review the snow blower operating manual and put the equipment where it can be easily accessed. Inexperience is a frequent cause of accidents. Check the fuel and oil, and make sure the engine will easily start and stop. Know how to quickly stop the snow throwing or blowing unit and shut the engine off if a problem arises. Do not operate snow removal equipment when it is dark or visibility is poor.
- Newer models are equipped with improved safety features and increased engine horsepower for better snow removal and reduced clogging. Snow blowers and throwers sold today have a lever that must be engaged by the operator for the equipment to operate. If the lever is released the drive train is disengaged and snow discharge stops. This safety feature has the advantage of stopping the machine if you lose control of the power unit for any reason.
- Clear the areas where snow will be removed of yard debris, sticks, rocks, water hoses, extension cords, toys, and such. Snow removal equipment can throw snow 20 feet or more and solid objects such as rocks or ice chunks may travel three times that distance.
- Accidents and injuries occur most often when a hand or other object is inserted in the

discharge chute and comes in contact with the turning blades of the blower/thrower unit. If the capacity of a snow blower/thrower is exceeded by wet, heavy snow, the discharge chute will clog. The high-speed augers, blades, and/or paddles are slowed and can become plugged. Don't overload the equipment. If snow is heavy, go more slowly and remove a narrower strip of snow with each pass. Avoid overloading the machine and keep the discharge unit turning at high-speed.

- If the discharge unit becomes clogged, resist the temptation to reach into or place an object such as a stick in the discharge chute. Turn the engine off and disconnect the sparkplug wire or electrical power. Use a wooden dowel or plastic rod to remove snow. Under no circumstances place your hand inside the discharge chute to remove the blockage. Even with the engine turned off, the discharge unit may spin when clogged snow is dislodged.
- When operating snow blowers and throwers direct the snow discharge chute away from people, animals, windows, vehicles and other property that may be damaged by flying debris. Be careful when turning because the direction of snow discharge will change.
- Travel up and down the face of slopes, rather than across the slope when removing snow from inclined surfaces. A slope that rises more than three feet with each ten feet of horizontal travel is too steep for traditional snow removing equipment. Take special care when changing directions on sloped surfaces. It is very easy to lose control of a snow blower or thrower when it is leaning to the left or right.
- Under windy conditions, start on the upwind side of the area to be cleared and throw the snow with the wind. The wind will help disperse the snow and prevent it from settling on cleared areas.
- When removing snow from a gravel driveway, set the blades an inch or more above the gravel to reduce the likelihood that gravel will launch through the discharge chute.
- Electric snow blowers have an electric motor that can also cause injury and electricity has the added hazard of electrocution. If the electric cord becomes caught in the machine, severe shock or electrocution can result. Begin snow removal close to the outlet and continue outward to minimize the chance of running over the power cord.
- Young children should not be allowed to operate power equipment. Age, maturity, and physical ability should be considered when permitting older children to operate this equipment. Young people should be closely supervised.
- Take care when refueling snow blowers and throwers. Keep gasoline powered equipment and fuel away from flames, sparks or excessive heat. Store fuel in a ventilated area. Allow the engine to cool before refueling and fill fuel tanks outdoors. If you would like learn more about snow removal equipment, try the local dealers or the Internet site <http://www.whats-the-best-snow-blower.com/access.shtml>.

* Richard Beard is Utah State University Extension Machinery Specialist