

Facilities Management Special Snow Removal Edition!



With the morning frost we have seen this past week, now is the time for my seasonal reminder of what campus should expect when the region is predicted to have or is experiencing winter precipitation – snow, sleet, slush, freezing rain, and everything in between.

As a winter storm approaches, Facilities Management spends a lot of time monitoring various weather forecasts as we try to put together a “best guess” about how the storm will affect the Western campus. We are aware of the fact that employees and students commute from a variety of locations in Whatcom and Skagit counties, but we also have to make sure the 4,000 or so students who live on campus have continued access to dining services and other key facilities.

Above all, SAFETY is the top priority. Is the campus reasonably safe for students and staff to navigate? Can the Facilities Management crews reasonably expect to keep up with the conditions expected (i.e. snow, ice, freezing conditions)? Is there enough time to clear sidewalks and parking areas before everyone gets to campus? For commuters, weather conditions in Whatcom and Skagit counties may be worse or better than in Bellingham. Western stresses that individuals must make their own decisions on whether to travel to Western during bad weather based on a specific assessment of their own safety and circumstances.

SNOW REMOVAL FAST FACTS

- The snow removal team consists of the 18 person Outdoor Maintenance Shop plus a volunteer team of custodians, plus anyone designated as essential personnel.
- Roughly 4 miles of streets and roads, 59 acres of parking lots, and 5.5 miles of sidewalks require snow removal and traction treatment....not to mention the dozens of stairs and building entrances which must be shoveled.
- Bellingham averages just under 12” of snow per year.

- We average about 2 major snow events per year.
- The average campus snow event is less than 2”, and is more about ice than snow.



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WHAT HAPPENS?

Day before:

- If the prognosis is for freezing temperatures and icy conditions, the Grounds Maintenance staff will pre-treat key areas with ice melt to mitigate the expected iciness.
- If the forecast is nearly certain for snow during the night, we will direct certain staff to come in early the next day to start snow removal.
- During the night, the University Police Department monitors conditions and asks for call-outs if needed.

Day of a storm:

- The Outdoor Maintenance Supervisor and Facilities Management Director arrive on campus between 3 and 5 AM.
- Based on current ice and snow conditions as well as the weather forecasts, the FM Director recommends to the Vice President of Business and Financial Affairs (VPBFA) a course of action – whether to remain open, to be closed, or to have a delayed opening. The VPBFA makes a recommendation to the President, who then makes a final decision. Our goal is to have a status message out by 6 AM.
- Throughout the day, conditions are monitored in case there is a need to change the status of the university. Campus members who encounter what they consider unsafe conditions are encouraged to report the location and description to Facilities Management Work Control at extension 3420.

Other considerations:

Even if campus is open during snowy weather, campus conditions are not likely to be what everyone would consider “normal”. The Outdoor Maintenance crew will focus on accessible routes between residence halls and dining halls, accessible routes to and from academic buildings, and access to handicapped entrances. That means that individual short-cuts and secondary pathways may not be cleared unless or until the work load permits.

Facilities Management also stays in touch with organizers of special events to determine what actions may be needed to keep those events running. For example, a scheduled basketball game at Carver Gym may mean our snow removal crews come in on a

weekend. On the other hand, if no major activities are scheduled, our efforts may be minimized during non-core hours.

For information on Western’s weather policies, transportation information, decision-making process and more, visit our weather information page online. <http://emergency.wvu.edu/inclement.html>



WHAT ELSE SHOULD YOU KNOW?

One question that frequently comes up during weather events is how to account for time. Human Resources will issue clarifying guidance on the day of certain events if the need arises.

Another common question is about why we don’t allow people to work while operations are suspended. The answer lies in the reasons for suspending operations. In addition to the safety considerations, a recommendation to delay opening is generally intended to enable the crew to clear roads, parking, and walkways with as little interference as possible. Well-meaning and responsible employees reporting to work may inadvertently be hindering or impeding progress!

Relevant Trivia

The National Weather Service, the Office of the Washington State Climatologist and the Farmer’s Almanac are all predicting a warmer winter than normal with below-normal snowfall.