

SHOVELING/SNOW BLOWING SAFETY

If you live in the "snow belt," many of you will be involved in snow removal activities, either at work or at home. Here are some important tips on removing snow safely.

SNOW BLOWERS

Snow blowers make clearing snow much easier than having to shovel it. But like any machine, they can be dangerous if operators don't take adequate safety precautions when using them.

To be safe when using a snow blower:

- Clear the area of any debris before you begin snow removal.
- Direct snow away from people and vehicles.
- Don't exceed the blower's capacity.
- Always stop the engine before cleaning snow from blades or chute.
- Never put your hand in the discharge chute. When the engine is turned off, clear away snow or debris with a shovel handle.
- Shut off engine and remove the spark plug wire before making repairs or mechanical adjustments.
- When clearing slopes, work up and down the slope, not across the face.
- Never leave a running snow blower unattended.
- Always handle and store gasoline safely.

SHOVELING

Shoveling snow is an extremely strenuous activity, especially if there's a lot of snow or if the snow is wet and heavy. You have to be careful of overexertion, which could lead to an injury.

To prevent injuries when shoveling snow:

- Stretch for a couple of minutes before shoveling to loosen up back, shoulder, neck, arm, and leg muscles.
- Pace yourself as you shovel to prevent overexertion. Start slow and give yourself a chance to warm up. Once you are warmed up, maintain a steady pace to reduce stress on your body.
- Lift smaller amounts when snow is heavy and wet.
- Breathe in while lifting and out while throwing.
- Keep your feet shoulder width apart for balance.
- Hold the shovel close to your body for better leverage and less strain.
- Push snow rather than lifting it when possible, especially when the snow is heavy. For example, push snow to the edge of walkways and then lift and throw it. This way you avoid continual lifting and you don't have to throw snow as far.
- When lifting a shovel full of snow, bend your knees, keep your back straight, tighten your stomach muscles, and lift with your legs.
- Avoid twisting your body when you throw the snow from the shovel. Twisting can cause muscle strain, especially in your lower back.
- When shoveling stairs, stand lower than the step you are shoveling and pull snow toward you. Repeat until you reach the bottom step. Then scoop, lift, and throw snow more easily.

Take breaks from time to time to give your muscles a chance to relax and avoid muscle strain.