

Talks **ZONE**

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TZ4915

Be shovel smart when it snows

Whether it is required to get out of the driveway to get to work or as part of regular job duties, shoveling snow is a fact of life for many North Americans.

Another fact, often ignored, is that this task can be a health and safety hazard, done in a rush with little thought given to types of shovels or shoveling techniques to reduce the risk of injury.

Snow doesn't always arrive on schedule and in easily managed amounts. Not being prepared for or going at it too hard can result in:

- Muscular strains and more serious injury, particularly to the lower back.
- Slips and falls.
- Heart attacks.
- Cold exposure.

Although shoveling snow can be an excellent workout for the physically fit, it frequently involves strenuous effort. Research has shown an increase in the number of fatal heart attacks among individuals shoveling snow following heavy snowfalls.

It is more practical to shovel early and often. Fresh, dry snow is lighter and more manageable than wet, heavily packed or partly melted snow.

Choose a snow shovel that is right for you. Be sure it has a curved handle that enables you to keep your back



straighter when shoveling. The handle length is correct when you can bend your knees slightly, flex your back 10 degrees or less, and hold the shovel comfortably in your hands at the start of the shoveling movement.

A plastic shovel blade will generally be lighter than a metal one, thus putting less strain on your spine.

Sometimes, a smaller blade is better than a larger one. Although a small blade can't shovel as much, it avoids the risk of trying to pick up too heavy a pile of snow.

Here are some more tips for safe snow shoveling:

- Dress appropriately. Light, layered, water-repellent clothing provides ventilation and insulation. It is also important to wear the appropriate head covering and thick, warm socks. Choose gloves or mittens that will keep your hands warm, dry and blister-free. Avoid falls by wearing

shoes or boots that have slip-resistant soles.

- Be sure your muscles are warm before you start. Cold, tight muscles are more likely to suffer a sprain or strain than are warm, relaxed muscles.
- Whenever possible, push the snow, do not lift it. Pushing puts far less strain on the spine.

If you must lift the snow, lift it properly. Squat with legs apart, knees bent and back straight. Lift with your legs. Do not bend at the waist. Scoop small amounts of snow into the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it. Holding a shovel of snow with your arms outstretched puts too much weight on your spine.

- When gripping the shovel, make sure your hands are at least 12 inches (30 centimeters) apart. Creating distance between them improves leverage and reduces the strain on your body.
- Never throw snow over your shoulder. This requires a twisting motion that stresses the back.
- Remember that wet snow can be very heavy. One full shovel load can weigh as much as 25 pounds (11.3 kilograms).
- Pace yourself. Take frequent breaks and prevent dehydration by drinking plenty of fluids.

The material contained in this document has been prepared from sources believed to be accurate and reliable. Application of this information to a specific worksite should be reviewed by a safety professional. Anyone making use of the information set forth herein does so at their own risk and assumes any and all liability arising therefrom. Specific medical advice should be obtained through consultation with a physician or other trained health care practitioner.

The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

Hold These Thoughts

If you choose to use a snowblower instead of a shovel this winter, here are some safety tips:

- Never stick your hands in the snowblower. If snow jams the snowblower, stop the engine and wait more than five seconds. Use a solid object to clear wet snow or debris from the chute. Beware of the recoil of the motor and blades after the machine has been turned off.
- Do not leave the snowblower unattended when it is running. Shut off the engine if you must walk away from the machine.
- Add fuel before starting the snowblower. Never add fuel when the engine is running or hot. Be sure to always fuel your snowblower outside, rather than in a garage, shed or enclosed area to avoid being overwhelmed by engine fumes. Never operate the machine in an enclosed area.
- Be aware that the engine can become very hot and burn unprotected flesh.
- Use the pull-cord safely. To start a machine with a pull-cord, hold it firmly and stand with feet wide apart in a broad stance. If the cord does not move freely, do not force it. Sharply pulling an immobile pull-cord may cause an injury to your upper body or back.
- If you are operating an electric snow blower, be aware of where the power cord is at all times. If the cord becomes caught in the machine and is severed, or comes in contact with the engine and burns, you could receive a shock or become electrocuted.
- No tampering. Do not remove safety devices, shields, or guards on switches, and keep hands and feet away from moving parts.
- Watch for the brief recoil of motor and blades that occurs after the machine has been turned off.

1. The type of shovel used can increase or decrease the risk of injury when shoveling snow.
TRUE ____ FALSE ____
2. Are slips and falls a risk when shoveling snow?
YES ____ NO ____
3. Which of these has been shown to increase among persons shoveling snow after a heavy snowfall?
 - A. Sprains.
 - B. Indigestion.
 - C. Heart attacks.
 - D. Breathing difficulty.
 - E. Torn tendons.
4. Using a plastic shovel blade puts more strain on the spine than using a metal one.
TRUE ____ FALSE ____
5. Which of these should be worn when shoveling snow:
 - A. Lightweight, water-repellent clothing.
 - B. Head covering.
 - C. Gloves or mittens that will keep the hands warm, dry and blister-free.
 - D. Warm footwear with slip-resistant soles.
 - E. All of the above.
6. It is better to lift snow rather than push it.
TRUE ____ FALSE ____
7. Which of these should NOT be done when shoveling snow:
 - A. Keep hands at least 12 inches (30 cm) apart when gripping the handle.
 - B. Scoop small amounts of snow and walk to where you want to dump it.
 - C. Throw snow over your shoulder with a rapid, twisting motion.
 - D. All of the above.
8. Is the handle on your snow shovel ergonomically correct?
YES ____ NO ____ DON'T KNOW ____

ANSWERS: 1. True, 2. Yes, 3. C., 4. False, 5. E., 6. False, 7. C., 8. Your answer

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For the Record

Date of Meeting: _____

Topic: _____

Location: _____

Department: _____

Start Time: _____ Finish Time: _____

Meeting Leader: _____

In Attendance:

Tips for Safety Meeting Leaders

Keep it concise. Assuming your employees have been through the required safety training, use safety meetings to shore up this training, not repeat it in its entirety. Pick a topic and select key points to drive home. Remember to tie your topic to what's happening in your operations to keep employees' attention.

Keep it consistent. You might be able to build safety talks into regular operations meetings. If your organization has a daily pre-shift meeting, put safety topics in there. If you have a weekly operations meeting, weave safety topics into that. If safe operations are a regular discussion topic, workers

will begin to understand that safety is the way you do business and not simply a compliance goal. Safety talks should not be a scripted monologue where employees just stare at the top of their supervisor's hard hat while he or she reads aloud. Short, punchy and personal approaches can keep safety at the forefront of your team's thoughts and performance.

Keep it courteous. Remind attendees to be open-minded and respectful to the suggestions of others. The leader should discourage interruptions and side conversations when someone is discussing their point of view.

Note: *TalksZone* safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.