

What Arctic Snow And Ice Control Does To Prep For Snow



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Randy Strait, owner of [Arctic Snow and Ice Control](#) of Frankfort, Illinois, is both a manufacturer and a contractor. Strait designed and built the plows for his suburban Chicago firm, which bills itself as “the industry leader in snow removal for nearly 40 years,” using patented sectional snow plow technology.

Preparing for a Chicago winter where a Christmas morning might be a matter of 70 degrees or one of 6-foot snow drifts is always a possibility, Strait suggests. Grappling with it “goes to the heart of being successful in this business,” he says.

“Preparing for snow begins months before winter begins,” he says. “The biggest misconception is that we do nothing all summer. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the winter months are when I get to relax the most.”



On-site deicing solutions, including the DoubleDown Salt Bucket, can replace a salt truck route, which saves on labor and equipment.

“We start in March and sign the bulk of our renewal contracts in April and May. While my sales staff is busy focusing on sales, my operations team is busy bringing equipment back to the yard and assessing any wear-and-tear the past winter may have caused. You are only good as your equipment, and completing repairs and maintenance to a fleet of more than 350 wheel loaders and skid steers, along with salt trucks, snow melters, pickups and sidewalk support vehicles, requires immediate action to complete the task by Nov. 1, when the equipment, which is largely dedicated to specific customers, is delivered to job sites.” Arctic also replaces its entire loader and skid steer fleet every year “despite the fact that we only put an average of less than 50 hours on each machine.”

While preparation and equipment maintenance are critical, “hiring and maintaining a seasonal workforce of more than 650 people is without a doubt the most challenging part of operating a snow business. In October, we have an employee-appreciation day and invite all of our operators and laborers back from the previous winter. It’s great to see so many familiar faces. It’s even better to know that those who show up to the party will most likely be on board come winter.”

Downtime can be a problem, however. Inventive equipment can help provide a solution.

“Hiring an operator is one thing, but keeping him busy throughout the winter is the bigger challenge,” says Strait. “In the past, my biggest fear was having a light winter and not being able to provide a full seasonal crew enough incentive to remain on board. Recently we invented and built the DoubleDown Salt Bucket with the express purpose to hopefully address all that. It is an attachment that goes on the skid steer or wheel loader just like our plow, eliminating the need for a salt truck. Most importantly, by using the same operators who plow parking lots to also salt those same lots (instead of employing a separate salt truck), we expect that the significant extra hours worked will encourage these seasonal operators to remain with Arctic until spring.”



It all comes down to probability. Says Strait, “I take winter forecasts with a grain of salt. I chuckle when a TV forecaster predicts in November that there will or will not be a bad winter ahead. Forecasters cannot accurately predict this weekend’s weather, much less the entire winter. My rule of thumb when planning my equipment, supplies and manpower is to assume that every snowfall will be 12 inches. If two to four inches come our way, plowing a property is a breeze. On the other hand, if 22 to 24 inches of snow, or even more, hit, that may be challenging, but it’s completely doable. To push through a storm, we use equipment equipped with Arctic Sectionals. Plowing with a pickup truck equipped with a snow plow is a thing of the past and too inefficient. One skid steer can outperform three pickup trucks, and one wheel loader with a 17-foot sectional can outperform seven pickup trucks. Also, that wheel loader is priceless when you need to stack snow high, which a pickup cannot do.

“The saying, ‘you get what you pay for,’ is especially true when it comes to the snow business. Time, equipment and salt are all needed to provide a clear parking lot. When bidding, I always keep in mind the possibility of a blizzard. As badly as I want the job, I always remind myself that I have a responsibility to my client to succeed in all worst-case scenarios. Blizzards are certainly not common, but their effects can be devastating if the price you quote to a customer does not allow for enough equipment to be assigned to the customer’s site.”

Real customers with real businesses in real buildings will always need snow removal, at least in cooler climes. “In an age in which online shopping has put many brick-and-mortar retailers at risk, such stores simply cannot afford

to be shut down at a critical time like the Christmas season,” says Strait. “Snow removal is a necessary evil but it is my job to ensure two things if I intend to have a future in this business. My services must be as efficient as possible to be affordable, and I have to make sure my customer stays in business at all times – even during the worst blizzard.”