

## Winter Maintenance Guidance

It would be nice to stay at home when the snow and ice arrives but sadly we all need to get to work and school. As part of the slips and trips campaign in our schools, planning for snow and ice is a must to help reduce accidents in the winter months. Each year, many staff, pupils and members of the public suffer personal injuries as a consequence of slipping and falling on ice and snow.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability Act place a responsibility upon the employer, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the means of access and egress from its premises are maintained in a condition that is safe and without risk to either its employees or other persons.

It is a popular misconception that an occupier cannot be held liable for failing to clear snow / ice, but can be held liable once an attempt at clearance has been made and then someone is injured. **As with any other risk the true position is that schools can be held liable for 'failing to act reasonably' in order to prevent accidents.**

Heads are responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to minimise the risks from snow and ice and a proportionate and prioritised approach should be taken to the clearance and treatment of routes within the school site.

### Risk Assessment

Head teachers and premises managers must ensure that a suitable risk assessment and planned response are in place in advance of severe weather, prioritising which routes will be cleared / treated. It may be prudent, depending on the size and complexity of your school, to include a simple site plan showing the priority areas to be treated may be useful.

All staff should be aware of the risk assessment and plan in place for severe weather and take responsibility for ensuring designated paths and access routes are utilised.

### Clearing Snow and Ice

- Staff should be made aware of their duties and responsibilities, it may be necessary for site staff to start work earlier on a particular day to commence clearance and salting/gritting.
- All persons clearing snow will be provided with suitable snow scrapers, shovels, rock salt and wear protective gloves, footwear and clothing and staff should take regular breaks from the task.
- Snow is easier to shift when its fresh as it becomes compacted by people walking over it.
- A route 1m wide should initially be cleared from the school gate to the main entrance – this will provide adequate space for wheelchairs and buggies.
- Once a path has been cleared rock salt should be used to assist with the prevention of ice (where temperatures remain below freezing treat cleared paths with a mixture of rock salt and grit/ sharp sand).
- Thereafter (as soon as practically possible) clear and treat similar paths between the main school building and other blocks, mobiles etc.
- Other routes into the school may then be cleared and opened for use as and when possible.
- Paths should be regularly checked throughout the day to ensure their continued safety.

- Cleared paths should continue to be treated on a regular basis until the risk of ice has passed. Caretakers should note that once recognised paths have been cleared and notified, every possible effort must be made to maintain them in a safe condition.
- Pay extra attention to steps and steep slopes - to clear snow & ice from these areas additional salt should be used to reduce the risk of slipping. A mixture of salt and grit/ sharp sand should be used to treat such surfaces (if the area does freeze again, has the advantage of leaving a residue, which provides a grip on surfaces)
- Where the Head teacher or premises manager has concerns over the safety of certain, routes, and playgrounds etc., those areas may need to be taken out of use. If this is the case this must be clearly communicated to all staff, pupils, parents and visitors. (If necessary use signs/cones/tape to reinforce this)
- All staff, pupils, parents and if possible, visitors must be informed which entrances will be cleared in the event of snow and ice.

### **Outdoor Play**

There is a balance to be struck between the risks and benefits of offering children play opportunities, the fact that there has been snowfall does not preclude pupils from playing outdoors.

Sensible judgements by Head teachers are all that is generally required in such circumstances to ensure pupils are not exposed to **significant** risk, e.g. schools may decide to stagger playtimes or increase levels of supervision, ensuring pupils are aware of any specific rules (e.g. no throwing of ice balls) and have appropriate clothing and footwear.

For further advice visit <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/get-ready-for-winter/out-and-about/the-snow-code>