



Weather related HAZARDS

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After a very cold winter that started in mid-November and continued until early February, a warm front turned the snow into freezing rain that collected on roads, sidewalks and roof tops. Warmer spring temperatures will bring wetter and heavier snow. We have had some of our heaviest snowfalls in March and even April. We still remember the heavy snowfalls in April 1997 that led to the “flood of the century.”

Spring snow, ice, thaw/freeze cycles and snow tracked into buildings all contribute to increased risks of roof collapse, property damage from falling ice and slip and fall incidents.

Many of these incidents will lead to property damage, some injuries will lead to liability claims and a few will result in civil litigation.

How do you as the property owner/manager protect yourself from these incidents and claims?

SNOW AND/OR ICE BUILD-UP ON ROOFS

Heavy snow loads or freezing rain build-ups on roofs can put high stress on the roof structures and may result in a roof collapse. There was a recent roof collapse following a freezing rain storm in early February in Manitoba that resulted in several injuries and one death.

ROOF AND BUILDINGS

- Initiate a roof inspection and maintenance program for snow/ice removal. Inspect snow / ice build-ups after heavy snow/ice or a series of smaller storms.
- Keep roof drains clear of ice and snow. Approved heating cables can be used to ensure that drain downspouts remain clear of ice.
- Remove ice build-up along eaves troughs and edges of the roof line to reduce ice damming under the roof covering.
- For a flat roof, identify roof drains with 3 to 4 ft. high flags in case of heavy snow build-up. Clear the roof drains and open paths to the drains to ensure drainage.



Pay particular attention to snow and ice build-up on:

- Roof sections with changes in elevation - snow accumulates on the lower section where it meets a higher section.
- Additions to the sides of higher buildings with steep roofs such as dressing rooms attached to sides of arch roofed arenas (snow build-ups on arena roof could crash down onto the dressing room roof).
- Roof sections with long expanses with unsupported roof trusses.

CLEARING SNOW/ICE ACCUMULATIONS

- Remove snow in a systematic pattern to avoid a build up in any one location that would overload the roof in that area.
- Identify and clear snow from any roof hatches and sky lights to prevent staff from walking on and possibly falling through these openings.

- Use safety rigs and lines to prevent staff from falling off a roof.
- Erect barricades surrounding building where snow/ice is being removed to keep vehicles and pedestrians away from falling snow area.
- Avoid using ice picks or sharp tools that could damage the roof.
- To avoid damage to roof covering, do not attempt to remove all of the ice cover.
- Use portable steam jets to remove ice build-ups on steep sections and to avoid damaging the roof.

ICICLES AND ICE PATCHES

Spring thaw/freeze cycles result in a number of problems that could result in injury or property damage to customers or passers-by.

Icicle build-up on the edges of the roof line can fall and injure pedestrians walking by or cause damage to vehicles parked near the building.

Water draining from roof downspouts often freezes at night. This creates large ice patches that present serious slip & fall hazards if located near entrances or walkways.

Potholes and low lying areas in parking lots will retain water and freeze into ice patches that present a potentially hazardous area for pedestrians and vehicles. Clear and thaw drains in parking and roadways to prevent water ponding and possible flooding.

PREVENTING SLIP AND FALL CLAIMS

EXTERIOR:

- Regularly check for icicle build-up around the roof line and remove the icicles.
- Barricade off the area below the section where icicles often build-up to prevent pedestrians from walking under the icicle area and to prevent cars from parking near the building where icicles could hit the cars.

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- Redirect roof drain downspouts away from entrances and walkways.
- Regularly sand and/or salt icy areas around entrances and handicapped parking areas.
- Check parking lots for potholes and water pooling areas and fill in these areas. Sand icy patches in the parking lots.
- Clean snow, ice and water build-up around entrances, exits, sidewalks and ramps. (Don't forget to clear the snow and ice from outside emergency exit doors.)

INTERIOR:

- Ensure that carpets, floor mats and stair runners are in good condition. (Not loose, torn or curled edges).
- Ensure that handrails on stairs and ramps are in place and secure to provide stability for people entering or leaving the building.
- Place safety cones and warning signs around entrances that may be wet and slippery from snow tracked in. Mop up excess moisture and dry floors as soon as possible. Use mats to absorb snow and water.
- Clean mats regularly especially during wet or slushy snow seasons.

REDUCING LIABILITY

The Occupier's Liability Act sets out the duty that a property owner/manager owes to any person entering the premises. Courts have defined this duty as one of reasonable care, not perfection.

Reasonable care would include regular inspection and maintenance of the property with increased frequency during periods of inclement weather such as following a heavy snow or freezing rain storm or during the thaw/freeze season.

Document all actions on log sheets, even if it is only an inspection where no further action is required.

Maintenance logs are the evidence you need to prove that you have met the Standard of Care needed to avoid liability in the event of an incident.

Should you or your staff have any questions please contact Ken Fingler at HED Insurance and Risk Services at 1-800-265-0314 ext. 7279 or by e-mail at kfingler@hedinc.com.

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