



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HIRING A  
**SNOW & ICE**  
MANAGEMENT CONTRACTOR



---

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HIRING A  
**SNOW & ICE**  
MANAGEMENT CONTRACTOR

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A SNOW & ICE REMOVAL CONTRACTOR .....	2
BEYOND PRICE: FACTORS THAT MATTER WHEN CHOOSING A CONTRACTOR .....	4
14 QUESTIONS TO ASK: INTERVIEWING SNOW & ICE REMOVAL COMPANIES .....	8
HIRING RED FLAGS: DON'T HIRE A SNOW & ICE CONTRACTOR IF .....	9
FIGHT THE FRUSTRATION WITH CLEAR COMMUNICATION .....	10
PARTNER WITH A SNOW & ICE CONTRACTOR THAT C.A.R.E.S .....	10

# INTRODUCTION

Winter weather in Northeast Ohio is a maintenance challenge for commercial property managers. Snow and ice can translate to potential safety hazards and financial liabilities—if you're not prepared. Accessibility and safety are non-negotiable for commercial and retail operators. And the reality in the northern Midwest is the ground could be covered with snow for a solid three months, and snow events may occur for a good half of the calendar year. Partnering with a responsive, well-equipped professional snow and ice management contractor is crucial for keeping your doors open.

Snow and ice services have a direct impact on your ability to generate revenue. So who will you hire to manage the snow and ice on your commercial property? That is an important decision, and this guide is designed to help you understand the responsibilities of a quality snow and ice management contractor, what factors can impact pricing, questions to ask when interviewing companies, hiring red flags and some communication tips to help you get the most out of your relationship once you bring a firm on board.

This summer you're focused on landscape maintenance and mowing, but we're here to tell you that winter's around the corner (again). We know, it seems too soon to think about snow and ice, but now is the best time to begin interviewing snow and ice removal companies so you can lock in a contract, secure the best pricing and be prepared for the inevitable. Don't wait to hire a snow and ice removal contractor. Make this decision well before winter weather is a glimmer on the Doppler radar. This resource will guide you through the hiring process.



# WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A SNOW & ICE REMOVAL CONTRACTOR

**When a winter storm warning is announced, you want the peace of mind that your commercial property is going to be cleared of snow and ice with an all-hands-on-deck sense of urgency.**

*You need a responsive partner, whether you're the property manager of a retail shopping center, office building, medical or hospital facility, industrial park, apartment complex or condominium.*

**T**iming is everything and a valuable snow and ice removal contractor must mobilize a team, dispatch crews, utilize resources (deicing products, sidewalk crews, skid steers, heavy-duty trucks) and deliver results: clear, safe surfaces so you can go about your business, whatever that is. So go into this hiring decision with high expectations. Ensuring the safety of your Northeast Ohio commercial property during winter is a serious responsibility, and it requires a snow and ice professional that is dedicated, certified and experienced and one that acts as a true partner to establish a solid winter maintenance plan that addresses your goals and budget.

**Here's a short list of expectations to have of the snow and ice management contractor you hire:**

- ✓ Responsive approach—a sense of urgency
- ✓ Industry association certifications (CSP and ASCA)
- ✓ Proper insurance and bonding
- ✓ A range of equipment: heavy-duty trucks with plows, ATVs, skid steers, spreaders and other tools for pushing snow and applying deicer
- ✓ Access to ice-melting resources (ask about salt stores)
- ✓ A 24/7 call center and single point of contact
- ✓ A snow and ice management plan tailored to your property

## What Your Commercial Property Needs

Like any type of maintenance service you buy, you'll find out that there are various levels of snow and ice removal that contractors offer—though they might not tell you outright that what they're delivering is just “pushing snow.” What does your property really need? Before you search for a snow and ice contractor, take the time to set priorities and address key concerns.

**Accessibility & Safety:** Take a good, hard look at your property layout. What areas must be accessed, no matter the weather? How large are your parking lots, and does your site include sidewalks, walkways, driveways and other pedestrian areas that must be cleared? What about truck delivery docks? **Consider the path customers, employees and guests drive and walk on your commercial property. Their safety is critical.**

**Service & Resources:** After evaluating your property's surfaces and how they must function in winter, a snow and ice contractor will present a menu of products and services designed to improve the accessibility and safety of your commercial property. (See the short list above.) That could include a combination of deicing products (including salt alternatives), heavy-duty trucks equipped with commercial-grade snowplows, ATVs and skid-steer loaders that can push snow off of walkways, and sidewalk crews that clear snow with shovels. Your commercial property could require a combination of these resources to ensure the best results. Does the snow and ice removal contractor have these capabilities? Find out before you hire the firm.

**Response & Communication:** What every commercial property needs is a snow and ice contractor that values response time and communication. (We'll talk more about this later on under Fight the Frustration.) **You want a single point of contact you can reach out to at any point in time.** This person should understand your property's snow and ice removal demands and serve as the leader of the team that will keep your property clear and safe. The reality is, if snow and ice are not managed properly, it can shut down your property. A quality snow and ice contractor will provide the service, expertise and resources to make sure winter weather does not create a hazard on your grounds.

## Develop A Snow & Ice Management Plan

Snow is a given—and the variables are “when” and “how much.” Before winter settles in, take the time to ask yourself: What's the plan? If you partner with a quality snow and ice management firm, they will act as a partner in this planning process by helping you understand:

1

**The potential liabilities on your property**

2

**What equipment and resources can be deployed during storms**

3

**How snow and ice removal can be executed before a storm sets in**

# BEYOND PRICE: FACTORS THAT MATTER WHEN CHOOSING A CONTRACTOR

**Snow and ice removal has a direct impact on your ability to generate revenue, whether you're the property manager of an office building, retail center or homeowner's association.**

**People must be able to pull safely into your parking lot and walk to your entrance. If snow prevents access and safety, you might as well hang a closed sign on your door.** Keep this in mind when considering the cost of snow and ice management services. We're not suggesting that you must pay the highest price to get the best service, but you do get what you pay for. Beyond price, here are some factors to consider when choosing a contractor and why price can fluctuate.

## Evaluate Equipment & Fleet

The equipment required to push heavy, wet snow extends beyond a basic truck and plow. Snow and ice removal on commercial properties calls for heavy-duty trucks, skid-steer loaders that are equipped with plows, ATVs with plow systems, and specialized hand-push tools that allow sidewalk crews to clear snow without making noise or disrupting residents or guests of a property. Spreaders are also required to distribute salt and deicing products.

The equipment and vehicles a snow and ice management contractor owns will illustrate the firm's capabilities, but downtime is also an important issue to address. Winters in Northeast Ohio are really tough on equipment and trucks. **Is the contractor prepared with extra vehicles and equipment in case of breakdowns?** Fleet uptime is critical for carrying out responsive, quality snow and ice removal service. **An experienced contractor is prepared with a contingency plan for the fleet in case problems arise during a storm.**



## Ask About Sustainability Efforts

We know the idea of snow and ice removal is to fight the snow—to clear it, haul it away, whatever the scope of work calls for on your commercial property. But a progressive snow and ice management firm works with, not against, the environment. This is accomplished by utilizing sustainable deicing techniques that are less harmful to your property.

There are innovative liquid deicers available for snow removal that can be used to pretreat ice melting products (like salt). This improves the performance of ice melting products, so you can get better results with less product. Pretreated ice melting products allow for safer, faster snow removal, so **be sure to ask the snow and ice management company you're considering how they maximize their deicing products and utilize sustainable practices.**

The reality is, salt in excess can be harmful to the environment and your property. Excess salt leaches into our water supply and can deteriorate the grass and plants underneath snow. This often occurs when salt bounces off of surfaces. Also, too much salt can wear down concrete surfaces, and you have to be especially careful if concrete has been poured within a year. It is more susceptible to salt damage. For all of these reasons, it's a good idea to seriously investigate the ways a snow and ice removal contractor uses ice melting products.



## Proactive Steps: Winter Damage Prevention

Many winter maintenance plans overlook steps to protect the landscape investment and instead focus on pushing snow. But clearing parking lots is just one aspect of the job. **Snow and ice management starts before the winter storm warning**, prior to the first cold snap. Protecting plants from winter damage is crucial, and this should be built into your company's plan.

Ask the snow and ice management contractor how it will winterize your evergreens and prevent winter burn in the landscape. During winter months, plants experience water loss through their foliage, making them susceptible to tissue damage. Blocking wind, thorough watering during winter, and the use of products like anti-desiccants can keep plants healthy during severe cold temperatures.

## Using Smaller Vs. Larger Snow Crews

Size matters when it comes to snow removal crews. You might think that a larger snow crew and more labor is better, but that's not the case with snow and ice removal. **Smaller crews with tighter territories can finish their routes faster. That means they can return to your property multiple times during a storm.** Large crews with extensive territories might get to your property once during the storm, and then they're traveling to other sites and too busy to come back for a second pass through your parking lots.

Larger crews can also get bogged down on a site, and removing snow and ice can actually take longer when there are too many crewmembers on the property. It's the "too many cooks in the kitchen" concept. Smaller crews, on the other hand, are able to give more attention to the properties they are serving. When routes are smaller, they can spend the time necessary to clear your property, and then they can return in a timely manner to keep the property safe and accessible. So ask how large snow and ice removal crews are and how long it takes a crew to finish a route. Ideally, a small crew will finish a route within two to three hours. That way, if a snow event occurs at 4:30 a.m., whether your property is the first or last on the route, it will be clear before the start of the business day.

## Opt For A Single Source Provider

When you can transition from fall to winter—and from snow season into spring—without changing contractors, your service is seamless and consistent. While you want to avoid hiring a contractor that can "do it all" but lacks the expertise to do it all well, it's a good idea to consider a single source provider that has the credentials, experience, staff and resources to maintain your property year-round. You'll gain a greater commitment and grow a strong relationship with a professional landscape/snow and ice management contractor that acts as the eyes and ears on your property 12 months out of the year.



# 14 QUESTIONS TO ASK: INTERVIEWING SNOW & ICE REMOVAL COMPANIES

**After identifying priorities for snow and ice management on your property, and vetting some providers that are equipped to handle your Northeast Ohio property, you'll want to interview the finalists and get to know the firms before hiring them.**

Do more than make a phone call. Request an in-person meeting with an account manager who will visit your property and conduct a walk-through with you to identify areas of concern (like high-liability slip-and-fall spots) and potential challenges. Get to know the contractor, and help the provider understand your needs—such as, what time surfaces must be clear of snow.

**Here are some interview questions to ask snow and ice removal contractors.**

1. How large are your crews?
2. What is your service area—how far is a crew driving during a single route?
3. How often do you plow properties during a single snow event?
4. Can I expect you to return to my property within a couple of hours?
5. What types of ice melting products do you use? How do you apply them?
6. Do you have an inventory of rock salt, and can you guarantee the availability of salt for my property?
7. Where will you pile the snow you push off of our parking lot? Can you haul it away?
8. Can I see proof of insurance?
9. Do you hold snow any ice industry association certifications, such as ASCA—Accredited Snow Contractors Association?
10. Who will be my point of contact, and how will you keep me updated about progress during snow events?
11. Aside from clearing snow and ice, what winter services will you provide to protect my landscape?
12. What other services do you provide beyond snow and ice management—can you be a single source provider?
13. Can you show us a portfolio of your work?
14. Will you provide a contact list of existing clients we can call to get their feedback on your snow and ice management services?

# HIRING RED FLAGS: DON'T HIRE A SNOW & ICE CONTRACTOR IF ...

**As a commercial property manager, you recognize that the scope of work on your site requires heavy-duty equipment, experienced professionals and a strategic winter plan.**

Watch out for contractors that sell you on a lower price. (Will this provider show up with a pickup truck and a plow designed to clear a residential driveway?)

Speaking of a plan—**a snow and ice management strategy is critical for success.** Look for a snow and ice removal contractor that will collaborate with you, really learn your property, work to understand your goals, and develop a comprehensive plan. Be wary of contractors who toss out bids without seeing your property in person or offer a package deal that isn't tailored to your landscape.

**And if the cost of services seems too good to be true, it probably is.** Snow and ice removal is labor and equipment intensive. Trucks burn through fuel in winter while pushing heavy loads of snow. Salt prices have increased exponentially. Depending on your property layout, clearing snow from walkways might require manual snow removal. Be sure that the contract clearly outlines every service, how it will be performed and what resources will be utilized to complete the job. That way you will avoid incurring surprise expenses during the season, such as fuel surcharges or price hikes because of salt shortages.

Regarding resources, and particularly ice melting products, find out if the contractor you're considering has secured an appropriate amount of salt to last the winter season, and **ask for a guarantee that your property will receive the ice melting products it requires.** Not all snow and ice management firms have the purchasing leverage to acquire the necessary ice-melting product required to manage their accounts given the supply and demand issues with rock salt this year.

Finally, rest assured that you can avoid hiring these "red flag" contractors by **educating yourself in advance** about what quality snow and ice management entails, and by referring to the 14 interview questions when vetting contractors to care for your Northeast Ohio property.

# FIGHT THE FRUSTRATION WITH CLEAR COMMUNICATION

You hired a snow and ice management contractor. Now what? First, you can expect that an experienced, quality contractor will collaborate with you to create a snow and ice removal strategy well before winter starts. That way, before the first snow flurries fly, you will be prepared. Communication begins before the announcement of any winter storm warning.

Then, when a snow event occurs, you should expect the contractor to keep you updated on the progress at your property. Has the parking lot been cleared? How fast is the snow falling, and are the crews keeping up? Do they need to make a second pass in

an hour to keep the grounds safe? What ice melting products are being applied before, during and after the storm to ensure the safety of people on the property?

**Communicating early and often—that's the hallmark of a quality snow and ice management**

**contractor.** And when you have a single point of contact at the firm, there's no confusion about who to call when. Ideally, you are provided with a cell phone number and e-mail address, so you can reach out to your contact when and how it's convenient for you.

## PARTNER WITH SNOW & ICE CONTRACTOR THAT C.A.R.E.S



Your commercial property deserves responsive, quality care this winter, and Schill is dedicated to serving property managers who share our values.

By partnering with Schill this winter, you're teaming up with a mainstay on Snow Magazine's Top 100 Contractor list who also happens to staff **the most ASCA Certified snow management professionals in Ohio**—top 5 in the nation.

Additionally, Jerry Schill and Jason Dickey are past recipients of Snow Magazine's Leadership Award—2011 and 2014, respectively—which recognizes contractors who display leadership within their company, industry and community.

When we partner and create a snow and ice management strategy for your Northeast Ohio site, we accomplish the ultimate goal of accessibility and safety, even in the most challenging winter weather conditions.

**At Schill, we call that acting as a contractor who C.A.R.E.s—an acronym we use that stands for Consistency, Accessibility, Reliability and Expertise.** That's the promise that backs everything we do at Schill Grounds Management. Let's talk more about snow and ice management for your Ohio property. Contact us any time at 440.327.3030, or [fill out this simple contact form](#) and we'll get in touch with you.



**LET IT  
SNOW!**

**SCHILL**  
Grounds Management