

# **Snow Plowing/Removal**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What happens when it starts to snow?**

Depending on the forecast and anticipated conditions pre, during, and pursuant to a snow/ice storm, the City of Bethlehem will pre-treat all of our streets within/up to 48 hours of the start of the event. We also typically conduct salt runs (apply road salt) on all our main streets in early and ending parts of a storm. Then plowing operations commence depending on accumulations with the main routes completed first, then secondary (residential areas) and then the smaller streets and alleys. Our operations are electronically monitored, recorded and augmented by direct field observations throughout and after the event.

### **How is a Snow Emergency Declared?**

The Director of Public Works, in conjunction with the Streets Superintendent and Police Chief monitor winter forecasts and make a recommendation to the Mayor.

### **Once the Snow Emergency has been declared how long do we have to remove our vehicles?**

The Snow Emergency goes into effect four (4) hours after declaration. Please note that the City and surrounding municipalities do not always declare snow emergencies at the same time. Check with your local news media or on the city's website ([www.bethlehem-pa.gov](http://www.bethlehem-pa.gov)) to see if the City of Bethlehem has called a snow emergency.

### **Whom do I contact in cases of Snow Plow Damage?**

Please contact the City of Bethlehem's Law Bureau at 610-865-7011. Please note that there are also private contractors and citizens who drive around with plows on their vehicles. All City vehicles are clearly marked with the City's emblem along with that vehicles Bureau/Department and vehicle number.

### **Who removes the snow from the sidewalks?**

Under City Codified Ordinance all persons owning, controlling or occupying any private property, premises, lot or tract of land adjoining or fronting upon any of the streets of the City shall remove snow and ice from the sidewalk area or footways of such premises within twenty-four (24) hours after it shall have ceased snowing, sleeting or raining. It shall be considered compliance if a cleared portion three (3') feet in width have been made upon such sidewalk or

footpath. Snow covered sidewalks increase the likelihood of slip and fall accidents. Questions regarding un-shoveled sidewalks can be directed to the City of Bethlehem's Engineering Bureau at 610-865-7063.

### **Can I throw the snow in the street when I shovel out my car or my sidewalk/driveway area?**

Although we understand the difficulty especially after significant snowfall, shoveling snow into public streets from vehicles and private driveways is strictly prohibited and against the law. It only makes the situation worse for everyone, prolongs the need to keep plowing, and creates hazardous conditions. The police department will issue citations for this behavior.

### **Who is responsible for the clearing of handicapped ramps?**

The abutting property owner is responsible to clean the handicapped ramp to make safe passage to the roadway pavement.

### **I have a medical condition. Can you plow my street in case there is an emergency and an ambulance needs to get through?**

During declared snow emergencies, we activate a call center which takes phone calls and dispatches plows in the area to assist with emergencies. The phone numbers are listed in the snow emergency declaration. Call **911** in life threatening emergencies.

### **Why do the plows always push snow into my driveway?**

For a resident this can be quite annoying, but unfortunately it cannot be helped. The snow must, at a minimum, be removed from the traveled portion of the road but our plow drivers are directed to plow curb to curb where possible. When the City experiences a heavy snowfall, if possible, do not shovel your driveway until after the plow has gone by and/or the street is fairly clear. If you must shovel do not throw the snow out onto the roadway as you may create a hazard for another vehicle, and if an accident were to occur you might be held liable.

### **Why don't you clear my driveway?**

The City does not clear driveways for two (2) main reasons:

1. There are thousands of driveways in the City. The task to complete and the cost to clear all the driveways each snow event is not feasible.
2. The liability to the City for damage to the driveway approaches is cost prohibitive.

### **I only have on-street parking. Why do you always plow snow against my car?**

The City must remove the snow from the traveled portion of the road. On two-way streets where there is only parking on one side, the plow operator cannot push the snow away from the parked cars into the oncoming traffic, as it would create a hazard and liability. Snow is always pushed away from the oncoming traffic. When heavy snowfalls are predicted, residents are asked where possible not to park on the roads. This is done to reduce the chance of plowing in parked vehicles, eliminating the chance of damaging vehicles and allowing for a more efficient plowing operation.

### **Why does the plow not remove all of the snow from my road?**

The plows are designed to ride on “guides” (shoes) that raise the blade approximately 3/8 inch from the surface of the roadway. This is done to prevent damage to both the vehicle and infrastructure from raised manholes, catch basins or water valves. When plowing, our goal is to make residential streets passable; not to clear them to the bare pavement. Once the street has been plowed and salted, the interaction of the salt and vehicular traffic is required to melt the remaining snow cover. Streets and alleys with low traffic volumes will therefore remain snow covered longer.

### **I live in a cul-de-sac, can we pile our snow in the middle of the circle?**

No. Piling the snow in the middle of the circle will not get the cul-de-sac removed any quicker and will lead to icy patches when the snow melts during the day and refreezes as temperatures drop overnight. It will also create a hazardous condition when the city plows come through in subsequent storms as the drivers cannot see if children are playing in the snow pile.

### **How do you decide what streets are main salt routes?**

The main salt routes are generally comprised of arterial roads and collector roads, as defined by traffic volume, fire/hospital emergency routes and LANTA transit bus routes. Snow routes are posted and you can review them on the City’s website ([www.bethlehem-pa.gov](http://www.bethlehem-pa.gov)).

### **Why do I never see a salt truck when it snows?**

The City of Bethlehem has over 260 miles of roads. The City’s main salt routes are maintained by upwards of 20 vehicles. Assistance is provided by our Water, Sewer, and Recycling Bureaus in assigned districts.

Depending upon the time of day, traffic volumes and snowfall amounts, the average main routes can take between 4 and 6 hours to complete one (1) pass. Plowing operations generally

require 12 to 24 hours after the end of the storm depending on snow amount totals. The trucks will continue back over until the storm has stopped and the streets are clear of snow and ice.

**Why do you not use sand for winter control?**

Salt is a very effective de-icing agent and is effective to temperatures as low as -12°C (10°F). Once temperatures are 20°F and falling we pre-treat our salt with Calcium Chloride to increase the effectiveness of the melting process. Sand has no de-icing properties. Sand is an abrasive substance and is used to increase traction for vehicles. The City will at times use a mixture of salt and anti-skid for icy conditions on our secondary, smaller streets and alleys. However, cleanup of sand from roadways and sewers throughout the municipality then becomes the next challenge.

**Bethlehem Service Center:**

24 hours a day, 7 days a week  
610-865-7000

**Streets Bureau:**

Regular Office Hours: 7:00 am – 3:00 pm  
Snow Operation Hours: 24 hours

**Phone:** For general information during a snow storm, call 610-865-7053.

**Website:** [www.bethlehem-pa.gov](http://www.bethlehem-pa.gov)