

The Curious Case Of The Less than Two-Inch Snowfall

Turf®

Tree Services®
Taking Tree Care to New Heights

DesignBuild®

PLOW®

Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

Does this sound familiar? Doug Delano, owner of Level Green Landscaping in Maryland, outlines his firm's snowfall tracking procedures and practices with snow manager Greg Stacho.



Where's the snow? Level Green Landscaping employees need to keep "minimal tolerance" snow clients happy no matter how much, or how little, the snowfall.

When the weather forecast calls for snow – even less than two inches – we snap into action the day before. Planning is everything. While some of our customers sign contracts stating they don't need our services unless it shows

at least two inches, others have more pressing needs. "Many of our clients have what we call 'minimal tolerance,'" Stacho says. "As long as flakes are falling from the sky, they want us there, even if it amounts to just half an inch."

Please Stand By

If the forecast calls for an inch and a half of snow starting at 3 a.m., we want our snow removal crews to be rested, not waiting up all night for the phone to ring. So crew members are told to get some rest, and are given a start time to report in the morning. "We need crews to come in," Stacho says. "We can't wait until we know if there'll be two inches."

We contact our minimal tolerance customers the night before, too, to inform them of our plan for their property. "We don't want to bother them at 2 a.m." Stacho says. "All that is done by 9 p.m. the night before."

High Tech Weather Tracking

On alert from the day before that snow is coming, Stacho checks the weather forecast at about 1:00 a.m. Years ago, people predicted winter weather by counting the number of acorns that tumbled from oak trees or observing orange stripes on fuzzy woolly worm caterpillars. These days, Stacho has a lot more tricks up his sleeve and it involves a lot more than tuning in to the TV news.

- **Meteorologist.** We have our own meteorologist we can call for the latest weather updates. "We call on him to get live data on how a storm is tracking," Stacho says.
- **Online Sources.** Stacho also monitors several online weather resources, using the same models and data meteorologists use. "I'm looking at several different models five and six days ahead," he says.
- **State Traffic Cameras.** Stacho has two computer screens tracking state highway administration traffic cameras that show him in real time what's happening out on the roads. "The state of Maryland has cameras from the state line all the way along the 95 corridor to DC," he says. "I can see that 15 miles away the roads are starting to get covered with snow. I can see that snow is coming from the south. It's information I can use to tell snow crews to get their trucks ready and plan to head out in a half hour." He adds, "The Maryland region is unique because winter weather is extremely unpredictable here. We're right on the line of temperature swings and on the battleground for storms that can either come up the coast or across the country."
- **State Ground Sensors.** Stacho also monitors Maryland's ground sensors that tell how cold or warm the ground is. This helps determine if the snow will or won't stick and if the ground is the right temperature for ice melt products to be effective. "Even though the air temperature is below freezing, the ground temperature might not be," he says. "I use that real time data to make decisions about how we react. We don't want to assume we should put salt down when the ground is so warm no snowfall will even stick."



To plow or not to plow when the snow forecast is unpredictable?

He adds that snowfall less than two inches is tricky, because temperature is a big factor. Snow might start to fall before dawn and stick, but then the sun comes out and it melts. Or the precipitation could start as rain, then abruptly change to accumulating snow. "It's actually easier to plan for storms that are four to 10 inches," Stacho says. "You know it'll stick. You know you'll need to plow."

The Countdown

1:30: Our office opens. Mechanics report for duty. Branch managers start coming in between now and 2 a.m. to monitor the weather and enact snow removal plans.

2 a.m: Another weather check. "The weather can change," Stacho says. "Maybe forecasters thought it would start at 3, but now it won't start until 5." If the snowfall is delayed, crews might be told to come in later. But traffic is always a concern, so crews may still come in at their original start time.

3 a.m: If we're still on track for accumulating snow, we call in snow removal crews who have been resting up for this job. "We try to be as proactive as possible," Stacho says.



All crew members have time

tracking programs on their cell phones that show where they are and what task they're doing.

4 a.m: Stacho calls 4 a.m. and 5 a.m. "battle zone hours." Crews are out treating the properties that have minimal tolerance, applying ice melt, plowing and shoveling. Tech comes into play again, such as GPS on vehicles, to keep lines of communication clear. "At any time I or any of our managers can pull up a screen and see where any of our vehicles are," Stacho says. If a mall property manager is on the phone reporting ice or snowfall and wondering when our truck will arrive, a manager can look on the screen and say, "I see a truck is at the back of your property now, putting down salt."

. "A crew member arrives at a job site, opens their phone and clocks in to their location," Stacho says. "Then he logs in that he's shoveling the sidewalk. If a property manager calls us we can use that technology to tell him exactly where our crews are and if they're shoveling, salting, or plowing – and even how many bags of salt they've put down." Crews take photos of their progress with their phones. The goal is to get all critical properties clear before they open for the day.

6 a.m: Lots, driveways, and sidewalks are clear for minimal tolerance customers and they're safe to open for business.

On Alert For Refreeze

The sun might be out and the snowfall clear, but we're not off duty. In our area, we get a lot of refreeze. If the temperature drops down to the 20s or low 30s at night, all those leftover puddles freeze. Treating that new ice is essential to keep people from slipping. We're on it.

For more on snow management and other topics, follow Delano's [blog](#).

Want to talk about Ice Management with fellow snow professionals? Join the discussions in the [Ice Management Forums at www.expired-link.com](http://www.expired-link.com).