



Cold Weather Advice for Schools

Over recent winters we have experienced some harsh conditions, therefore it is important to remember how to protect your staff and your property, and prevent insurance claims.

The advice in this document has been provided by:

- Risk Management
- Health & Safety
- Passenger Transport
- Premises & Planning
- Shire Services
- Property Services Group

Contact details for the above can be found at the end of this document.

Emergency Closures/Snowline

There is in place a procedure to follow should an emergency closure of your school be necessary due to severe weather. Please see the following area of the Shropshire Learning Gateway:-

<https://www.shropshirelg.net/services/education-improvement-service/emergency-closures-winter-weather/>

Salt Supply

This year's Salt/Grit suppliers are:-

Sodexo

Tel: 07920 362024

Email: angela.buckley@sodexo.com

For further details of this year's supplier(s) please use the following link:-

<https://www.shropshirelg.net/general-announcements/salt-suppliers,-cold-weather-advice-and-premises-services-christmas-cover/>

Protecting your Property - Internal and External

Extreme cold conditions can lead to burst pipes and subsequent water damage in Shropshire Council properties. Although the resulting damage in such cases is covered by

the Council's corporate Property Insurance, the time spent in dealing with the incident, together with any related claim will not be.

A claim for extensive water damage can mean that the repairs and the claim are not finalised for many months. The simplest solution is to do what you can to prevent an incident occurring in the first place and to look for ways to minimise the damage if something was to happen.

Attached at Appendix A are three checklists to assist you when considering ways to protect your school and people who use your site:

- heating checklist
- pipework checklist
- site maintenance checklist

Please note these checklists are not exhaustive - they are merely a starting point.

Gritting/Salting

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 gets injured. The true position is that an occupier can be held liable for 'failing to act reasonably' in order to prevent accidents.

There are several areas of legislation where it is pointed out a duty of care is owed to the employees, pupils and visitors (lawful or unlawful) including:

- Health & Safety at Work Act
- Workplace Regulations
- Occupiers Liability Act

It is important that access to school sites and buildings is safe for staff, pupils and visitors and adequate arrangements are made to ensure risks from snow and ice are minimised. It is recognised it is not possible to remove immediately every piece of snow and ice - so we must prove whatever we decide to do is reasonable and practicable.

The key to defending slipping on snow/ice claims is to prove that you have a system in place and that you follow your procedures/policies. The courts would require documentation to prove the following points before deciding if a school had been negligent:

- a snow/ice/gritting policy in place at the time of the incident
- the policy is reasonable/practicable
- the policy is communicated to staff and other relevant site users
- the procedures set out in the policy were adhered to

Our Health & Safety Team have also advised:

Winter gritting of car parks and paths can be time consuming and a resource issue. This is where risk assessment comes into place by prioritising action based on the nature, frequency etc. of the hazards identified. Your risk assessment should consider, main routes, pathways etc. Controls measures should consider communications to members of staff and to visitors who will come onto the site, limiting access to some areas in severe weather etc.

Some measures can include: using Met Office data – to anticipate the impact of bad weather. This means that salting can be done in advance of a bad frost and also you only salt when you need to – potentially saving time and resource over the course of a winter.

Finally, don't forget the need to demonstrate that you've taken reasonable steps. Bad weather is above all unpredictable. Even if you very significantly reduce the risks, an accident is still possible. To effectively pre-empt legal challenges and insurance claims, documenting any action you do take is important.

Headteachers for schools should ensure adequate risk assessments have been carried out and the control measures identified are in place prior to the winter season.

The control measures may include:

- the adequate provision/storage of de-icing salt as appropriate
- identifying those who would carry out the salting activity
- ensuring adequate training has been provided including manual handling
- producing a gritting plan to prioritise which areas will be treated and brought to the attention of all those concerned

There is no simple answer to the gritting questions. Each school will have different needs and therefore require individual risk assessments.

As a guide to documenting such an assessment use the following link to a 'gritting in icy conditions' generic template which can be used by premises to set out their local procedures for dealing with such conditions.

<http://staff.shropshire.gov.uk/how-do-i/health-and-safety/how-do-i-complete-a-risk-assessment/>

Remember - this document must be personalised to suit the individual school and is a guide as to the kind of issues that require consideration.

Guidelines for Shire Services Cleaner in Charge staff at primary schools where Shire Services staff are responsible for opening the premise are detailed at Appendix C.

Vehicle Maintenance

If you are using a vehicle in cold/icy conditions it is important that you consider the following:

- Follow national guidance, listen to national and local weather forecasts - only set out if your journey is absolutely necessary – Is an alternative method of travel available?
- During bad weather let people know where you are going, your route of travel and when you expect to arrive. Plan your route well in advance.
- Allow for extra driving time or consider delaying your journey if the weather is inclement.
- If you must travel, make sure you have certain items in the vehicle, e.g. shovel, de-icer, warm clothing and blankets, food, hot drinks and a fully charged mobile phone.
- Adapt your driving style to the conditions. Be smooth and gentle with steering and brakes and allow much longer breaking distances than you would normally. Always try and use the highest possible gear to avoid sudden acceleration on icy roads or in snow conditions.
- When warming your vehicle up - don't leave it unattended with the keys in the ignition - there is no cover for this on any Motor insurance policy.

- Have your Antifreeze checked in the Autumn to ensure that you avoid engine damage caused by frozen cooling systems, check your car handbook to ensure you use the right type of fluid as there are different types required for certain engines.
- Ensure that windscreens and all windows are defrosted and clear before driving.
- Check that wipers are not frozen to screens and water jets are not frozen before being used. To do so may blow a fuse or damage the wiper motor and blades. Use 'All Season' or 'Winter Screenwash'.
- For vehicles equipped with Air conditioning or Climate control the quickest way to demist or defrost the vehicle is to put the system on re-circulation, maximum heat and run for 5 minutes.
- If your battery is sluggish in autumn, get it checked as Frosty weather can reduce the battery efficiency by 30%.

Attached at Appendix B is a Vehicle Maintenance checklist to assist you.

Public Transport

The Passenger Transport Services' Team have produced a document for pupils using public transport in which there is guidance for issues arising as a result of severe weather and emergencies. Please contact the Passenger Transport Services' Team to obtain a copy of this document.

Code of Conduct and Guidance for Operators, Drivers and Escorts

The Passenger Transport Services' Team have produced the above document which provides severe weather guidance.

Please contact the Passenger Transport Services' Team to obtain a copy of this document.

School Meals

In the event of severe weather, causing disruption to the school meals service, either by catering staff not being able to attend work or the school being partly or totally closed. You should notify the school meals helpline on 01743 250260 or contact the relevant Area Manager directly.

If catering staff are unable to attend work, alternative arrangements will be put in place to ensure that a hot meal is provided for all children attending school that day. Please do not ask parents to provide a packed lunch unless you have been advised by Shire Services that it will not be possible to provide a meal.

Any queries about the school meals service please call either your Area Manager or the helpline.

Business Continuity

To reduce the impact of adverse weather conditions we recommend you consider taking the following steps:

- Review your Emergency Response & Business Recovery Plan.
- Think about how you will communicate with your staff in the event of an out-of-hours incident where, for example, you do not want people to attend a site on the following working day.
- Consider how you might deal with staff who become stranded at work.
- Give early warnings of any problems to your customers and suppliers.

- Make sure you have up to date contact details for all staff.
- List the telephone numbers of the people you may need to contact for assistance, e.g. Insurance team, Property Services Group etc.
- Make sure that only essential business travel continues between sites.
- Wherever appropriate provide regular updates to staff and any other impacted stakeholders.

Contact Information

Risk, Insurance & Resilience Team

(01743) 252092

insurance@shropshire.gov.uk

<http://staff.shropshire.gov.uk/how-do-i/risk-management-and-insurance/risk-management-and-insurance-team-contact-information/>

Health & Safety Team

(01743) 252819

health.safety@shropshire.gov.uk

<http://staff.shropshire.gov.uk/how-do-i/health-and-safety/how-do-i-contact-the-health-and-safety-team/>

Passenger Transport Team

(01743) 253031

Transport Operations Group

(01743) 254944

Property Services Group

EMERGENCY OUT OF HOURS MOBILE – 07990 087815

Steve Carpenter – Property Services Group Manager - 01743 281094 / 07990 085499

steve.carpenter@shropshire.gov.uk

North Team Leader –

Peter Allen - 01743 255378

North Team Business Support –

Sarah Hesketh – 01743 281051

South Team Leader –

Phil Brown – 01743 281067

South Team Business Support –

Joyce Brisbane – 01743 281085

Shire Services

(01743) 250250

Shire Services (Helplines)

(01743) 250270 for cleaning

(01743) 250260 for catering

HSE

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/slips/fag.htm#icyconditions>

Helpful Links for Weather Monitoring

Met Office website

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk>

BBC weather website

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather/forecast/22>

Appendix A

Heating Checklist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Monitor weather forecasts and temperature (see Useful Links for Weather Monitoring).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check heating systems work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check stocks of heating oil/wood pellets – are these adequate to last for the holiday period.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure thermostats and frost-stats are working and are set correctly.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Close all blinds and curtains, tucking curtains behind radiators.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pull soft fabrics etc. (e.g. seating) away from radiators/heating appliances so they can function.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure all radiator valves are in the on position and correctly set.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Burst Pipe Prevention Checklist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consider draining pipes if areas are to be unused for long periods (please note there is no insurance cover in place for buildings left unoccupied for more than 30 days).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Protect water pipes, especially where they run outside or through unheated areas.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure insulation is in place, windows are not broken and openings are sealed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Turn off extractor fans and check kitchen ventilation systems	<input type="checkbox"/>
Repair dripping taps, faulty washers to prevent freezing.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Turn off all valves serving outside taps.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Know where your stop taps and valves are located – ensure they are not seized up.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure electrical and other perishable items are not stored on the floor.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inspect your buildings daily after a period of freezing weather to look for any damage.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notify Property Services Group immediately if your water supply becomes frozen, so steps can be taken to avoid damage once a thaw sets in.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Run taps and flush toilets to check that water in pipes has not frozen.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Site Maintenance Checklist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ensure all outdoor lighting is working and check summer growth of landscaping trees/shrubs does not obscure lighting units or cast strong shadows across pedestrian routes.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure gutters/downpipes are clear so melting snow/ice can efficiently drain away from the buildings.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check roofs for missing/damaged tiles and replace/repair.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clear fallen leaves from external pavement steps, basement stairwells, surface drainage gullies, grills or grates.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure draining channels and grids are clear to permit melting snow/ice to drain away from the play area surfaces, paths and roadways - reducing the risk of slip hazards in the event of refreezing.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B

Vehicle Maintenance Checklist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Keep up to date with road conditions, accidents and road closures.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check tyre, battery and wiper blade condition.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure lights are fully functioning.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check oil and fuel levels before leaving.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check anti-freeze levels and carry de-icer in case the locks freeze.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have your breakdown telephone helpline number and mobile phone with you.	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you do have an accident and the vehicle is immobilised use your hazard warning lights to alert other motorists.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C

Cold Weather Gritting Snow Clearance Advice for Shire Services Cleaner in Charge staff at Primary Schools where Shire Services staff are responsible for opening the premises.

Headteachers need to provide risk assessments, out of hours contact numbers, training, machinery and supplies for teams who are responsible for clearing snow or gritting areas so that they are aware of the appropriate policies and procedures.

Direction on what is acceptable and what is not may differ at each premise.

Staff must take care of themselves during adverse weather conditions as those with key holder responsibilities will be first on site. Advice may be required on who to make contact with in the event of an emergency or difficult situation found on arrival.

It is important that staff have easy access to the equipment needed to clear/grit access and egress areas.

There will be restrictions at some sites as it would be impractical to clear/grit all pathways. It is recommended that a discussion is held with the team or employee to agree a plan which is safe for all.

In the event that the gritting needs to be undertaken the school will need to communicate the agreed access/egress to all premise staff and visitors.

Suggested Processes for Consideration;

1. Check that premise heating systems are operational.
2. Collect equipment for snow and ice clearance which should be stored near place of arrival to avoid employee being at risk.
3. Employee to observe manual handling risk assessment – not lift or transport items that are too heavy.
4. Larger areas require a suitable grit spreader to combat ice and snow on access ways. Always clear snow first and then grit the area.
5. To move snow use a suitable clearance shovel – this should be lightweight. Move snow out of pathways, do not lift.
6. Once snow is cleared, grit the area using a suitable spreader.
7. For small areas a reduced quantity of grit in a container can be used. Keep the content to a minimum to avoid injury. Do not twist or over stretch when spreading grit. Always follow Manual Handling procedures and the Gritting Risk Assessments.

Staff should not put themselves at risk, keep safe at all times and follow policy and procedures and the gritting process agreed for the site.

Should you have any queries or need advice contact either your Area Supervisor or the Shire Services Compliance Officer on (01743) 250255.