

## Five Tips for Hiring a Snow Contractor

Establishing a relationship with a reputable snow-removal contractor will protect a business' ability to operate. Here are five simple tips for businesses looking to keep the ice and snow from freezing their profits.

1. Ask about the contractor's system of record keeping. Lawsuits from slips and falls can top a half million dollars. Hiring a snow contractor that maintains logs of your site's conditions along with what was performed and when it was done will provide a level of insurance for a business if it becomes the target of a lawsuit — even if it's a couple of years down the road. If a contractor has maintained impeccable records, the business or property management company will be able to easily prove it is not liable due to negligence. This is probably the No. 1 thing for store or property owners. You need to know that if you're involved in a claim you will have a company that has the record keeping you need to prove reasonable care.

2. Ensure it's insured. While logs provides a form of protection, actual insurance that's adequate and from a reputable agency will protect a business further. You need proof that the contractor indeed has insurance specific to the business they are in. It is surprising how many so called snow contractors don't have this insurance and this puts more liability on you as the business or property owner should someone fall.

3. In it to win it. Just because the temperature climbs to 5 degrees one day doesn't mean that winter is over. Temps fall just as fast as they climb, and a snow removal contractor must have equipment and personnel ready to respond on a moment's notice between Nov. 1 and April 15. Businesses need to be careful about hiring part-time snow removal contractors. If warm temperatures get them pulling their equipment away to do other things, a business can be left in a lurch in a surprise snow event. We all know how quickly the weather can change!

4. "Owned and operated by ..." It's not unusual these days for a big company to subcontract jobs to other businesses that sometimes turn around and produce a third-generation contract. Each step separates the business farther from the work they want done, and the quality often diminishes with each subcontract. Hiring a contractor who owns and operates his or her own equipment provides greater assurance that the job will be done right and completed quickly. Beyond that, a small subcontractor won't have the buying power a bigger contractor will. When there's a salt shortage, guess who loses out? A contractor large enough to purchase and store their own salt ahead of time will prevent the slippery havoc— and liability issues — that could follow.

5. Building a relationship with your contractor. Plan out three to five years when hiring a contractor. They will be more familiar with the property and more likely to purchase specialty equipment for the particular job when there's a long-term investment. Of course, be sure to have a 30-day cancellation notice due to poor service written into any contract as a fail-safe.