

Safety Short

Snowplow Safety / Winter Operations



Snow plowing and removal on Maine roads and highways is a tough job and a big responsibility. Operating a snowplow safely requires that you understand and remain alert to a variety of potential hazards, including weather and road conditions, roadside obstacles, animals and pedestrians, vehicle operations and especially other drivers. It is also critical to be aware of your own personal limitations and to always practice defensive driving techniques.

Even though we can't control the weather or other drivers, we can control the condition of our vehicle and our driving habits. The following tips will help you accomplish the goal of clearing roadways without causing an accident.

- Before the first storm, drive and inspect your plow route for potential hazards such as raised manholes or storm drains, protruding curbing, rock walls, mailboxes, signs, raised or loose pavement, holes, new fences, tree limbs, etc. These should be removed, repaired, or flagged. Familiarize yourself with narrow roads, guardrail locations, blind spots, drop offs and other hazardous conditions.
- Get plenty of rest before an expected storm hits. Do not operate after consuming alcohol or using prescription drugs that may cause drowsiness.
- Prepare for changing weather and road conditions by monitoring the local weather forecast.
- Inspect (circle check) your vehicle and equipment before you begin your snow plowing duties. Check tires, fluid levels, lights, brakes, chains, plows and wings, spreaders, etc. Also make sure the vehicle frame and body is free of sand and rocks that might cause damage to following vehicles. Document the inspection.
- Dress for the conditions that you expect to encounter. Bring extra layers of clothes and spare gloves.
- Always wear your seatbelt!
- Maintain communications: Keep in contact with base and if appropriate, the local police and / or fire department.
- Stop periodically to clear ice and snow completely from windows and from headlights, backlights, and warning lights.
- Follow defensive driving practices. Increase your following distance behind other vehicles. Allow tailgaters to safely pass you. Adjust your driving according to road conditions, traffic, visibility, terrain, and other factors.
- Allow for extra stopping distances on ice and snow. Be especially cautious when entering intersections.
- Avoid unnecessary backing. Back up only when there is no other way to get the job done. Continuously check both sides, the front and behind your vehicle for adequate clearances. Make sure mirrors are properly adjusted.
- Make sure the audible back-up alarm is working.