

Ice & Snow in Bellevue – F.A.Q.'s

Q: What does the city do to prepare for winter weather?

A: The Transportation Department has 17 trucks that can be configured with plows and sanders to clear roadways of snow and ice. One truck with a plow and sander is always ready to go, but the rest of the vehicles are used for regular daily operations and fitted with plows and sanders only when snow or ice is forecast. During a major storm, up to 25 employees at a time work in two 12-hour shifts, around-the-clock, with help from other departments.

Q: What's the city's policy on clearing streets of ice and snow?

A: During conditions of ice and snow, the city strives to provide passable routes for emergency, commercial, and private vehicles on the city's public roads. Passable means that someone with the appropriate equipment, driving ability and judgment, traveling at an appropriate speed, can travel on the street once it's been serviced. Using a "priority response system," arterials and neighborhood connector streets receive all snow removal resources until clear and stable. After that, secondary and residential streets are serviced.

Q: How do big and steep hills affect the snow response?

A: The city's 1,400-foot elevation range from Lake Washington to Cougar Mountain is the most of any city in the area and presents unique challenges when it comes to snow and ice. Since most ice and snow occurs at higher elevations, the resources the city has are usually sufficient to service priority routes and residential streets. The challenge comes when snow is widespread. If that happens, crews may not get to all city streets before the snow melts.

Q: Why does it sometimes take so long to clear the streets of ice and snow?

A: Normally, the city's resources are enough to clear streets efficiently after snow or ice accumulates. Main arterials and neighborhood connector routes are the top priority and are cleared first to accommodate emergency vehicles, as well as transit, school buses, and commuter traffic. During a city-wide event, however, the available resources must be used to service a much larger area. When that happens, even priority routes may receive limited attention and residential streets may not get cleared at all.

Q: I live on a steep street. Why don't city crews clear it after it snows?

A: Sometimes, it's not safe for the city's large snow-clearing equipment to venture onto steep, residential streets. At other times, it may be a matter of priority. Steeper, less traveled streets are not cleared in favor of arterials that serve the greatest number of people.

Q: What are snow response priorities?

A: Bellevue does not have established snow routes. There is no guarantee that a specific street will be passable. However, "snow response priorities" means that prioritized streets are cleared first.

Q: Why does the city close roads after a snowfall?

A: Bellevue does not automatically close roads, but some streets may be closed for safety reasons due to specific circumstances. Sometimes roads have to be closed to traffic temporarily while snowplows service them. Closure decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

Q: What should I do if I must park and leave my car?

A: Police recommend you make every attempt to move your vehicle completely off the roadway; parallel park your car as close to the curb as possible if you must park on the road; don't park sideways on the road or in an intersection. If you must park your car, leave your phone number visible on the dashboard. Abandoned vehicles in the road will be towed as soon as possible. To avoid being impounded, return to your vehicle as soon as is practical.

Q: Does the city use anti-icers or deicers? Are they bad for the environment?

A: When conditions warrant before a snowstorm, the Transportation Department sprays the streets with a calcium chloride-based liquid anti-icer that prevents ice from adhering to the pavement. The product is applied when the forecast calls for dry conditions prior to icing or snow. If snow or ice does build up on streets, a solid deicer containing calcium chloride is mixed into the sand. It's more environmentally benign than sodium chloride (salt).

Q: What should I do to prepare for ice and snow in Bellevue?

A: Learn the priority response plan prior to the snow season to learn the best route to take when there are ice or snow conditions. When bad weather is in the forecast, please plan ahead. Before leaving home, prepare your vehicle and allow extra time to reach your destination. Check to make sure you have the proper emergency equipment, test new chains for proper fit before the first snow and take a charged cell phone if you have one. Before bad weather sets in, find a less hilly route home, if possible, even if it takes longer. When it comes to driving on snow and ice, the shortest route isn't always the fastest.

Q: What should I do to stay safer once I am on the road?

A: Have your cell phone charged; let your car warm up; make sure all lights work and are clear of ice and snow; and clean ice and snow off your wiper blades.

Q: What tips can you give me about driving on ice and snow?

A: The faster you're going, the longer it will take to stop, so give yourself plenty of room. Winter conditions call for more gradual acceleration, slower speeds, slower steering and slower braking. Never slam the brakes. If you have anti-lock brakes, press the pedal down firmly and hold it. If you don't, gently pump the pedal. Also, increase your following distance, turn on your headlights and slow down when approaching bridges, intersections and shady spots, which can develop black ice, which is a thin layer of water that freezes clear, making the road look wet. When visibility is limited, follow the edge of the right lane as your guide. Signal your intentions at all times, as vehicles following you will need to know when you're turning. Do not drive around "Road Closed" signs or barricades.

Q: Where can I get more information about winter driving?

A: For information about winter driving, visit the City of Bellevue website at www.bellevuewa.gov and click on the "Extreme Weather Response" button on the right side of the page. The site also contains information on topics such as power outages, storm debris and garbage collection, a snow response priorities map, and important phone numbers and websites. The state Department of Transportation's Winter Travel web page at <http://www.wsdot.com/winter/> provides further information and tips. For how to handle skids: <https://www.wikihow.com/Drive-on-Black-Ice> or <http://www.smartmotorist.com/driving-guideline/how-to-handle-your-car-on-snow-and-ice.html>