



COMMUNITY BUILDER

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Winter is Coming: Hazards and Association Safety

As the days grow shorter and the air turns crisp, there's no denying that winter is on its way. For community associations in the northern parts of the country, the impending winter season brings both the magic of snowy landscapes and the challenges of ensuring safety and preparedness for all residents. The hazards associated with winter weather are numerous, from icy sidewalks to frozen pipes and more. However, with proactive planning and a commitment to safety, community associations can navigate the winter season successfully. In this article, we'll explore the potential hazards of winter and provide valuable insights into what board members can do now to prepare for the upcoming winter season.



Winter Hazards

Before delving into preparations, it's essential to understand the specific hazards that winter weather can pose to community associations. By identifying these potential issues, associations can take a targeted approach to mitigate risks. The following are the most common winter hazards:

1. **Slippery Walkways and Parking Lots:** Snow and ice accumulation can create slippery surfaces, making it hazardous for residents to walk safely around the community. Slip and fall accidents are a significant concern during the winter months.
2. **Snow Accumulation:** Heavy snowfall can obstruct roadways, driveways, and emergency access routes, hindering transportation and emergency response efforts.
3. **Power Outages:** Winter storms can bring down power lines and cause electrical outages, leaving residents without heat and electricity.

4. **Heating System Failures:** Malfunctioning or inadequately maintained heating systems can leave common areas and water/utility closets without the necessary heat to prevent pipes from freezing.
5. **Ice Dams and Frozen Pipes:** Subfreezing temperatures can cause pipes to freeze and burst, leading to costly water damage and repair bills. Externally, melting snow can freeze in the gutters and along roof lines, causing ice dams.
6. **Tree Damage:** Snow and ice can weigh down tree branches, potentially damaging trees and causing limbs to fall.

Preparing for Winter Safety

To ensure the safety and well-being of residents, community associations and board members should start preparations well before winter's arrival. Here are key steps to consider:

- **Evaluate Snow Removal Contracts:** Communities in northern states are encouraged to begin reviewing and selecting snow vendors in September of each year, well before the first predicted snowfall. This is primarily to ensure that the association can enter into an agreement with a reputable vendor before reaching capacity with other clients. Additionally, it ensures that a plan is in place in the event of an early snowfall.
- **Create a Snow and Ice Removal Plan:** Develop a comprehensive snow and ice removal plan that outlines responsibilities, procedures, and a schedule for clearing walkways, parking lots, and common areas. The plan must be flexible, as every snow event is unique. Collaborating with a trusted snow removal vendor is highly recommended, as their expertise can help ensure a seamless execution of the implemented plans.
- **Make Tree Maintenance a Priority:** Conduct regular tree inspections in the fall to identify branches that are weak or at risk of falling during winter storms and prune or remove hazardous branches to prevent accidents and property damage.
- **Fall Landscape and Amenities Clean-Up:** A clean-up of landscaping beds and common areas to remove leaves and twigs is helpful to ensure effective drainage. Additionally, irrigation systems should be winterized, pond fountains removed and stored out of the elements, and pools drained to the manufacturers' recommended water level.
- **Winterize Buildings and Common Areas:** Ensure all community buildings, including clubhouses and recreational facilities, are properly winterized. This may include insulating pipes, sealing drafts, clearing gutters, and servicing heating systems.
- **Set Communication Guidelines:** Establish a reliable system for emergency communication with residents and set expectations for homeowners regarding how they will receive communication in an emergency. This may include email alerts or a community-wide notification system to inform residents about important updates and safety instructions.
- **Emergency Services Access:** Ensure that emergency services can access the community during winter weather. This includes installing snow markers and snow fences, keeping roads and driveways in good condition, and ensuring clear access to fire hydrants for firefighters.

Winter may bring picturesque snowscapes, but it also presents numerous hazards and challenges for community associations. Preparing your community for winter can significantly contribute to the seamless operation of the association and, more importantly, the safety and well-being of residents during the winter season. It's crucial to remember that thoughtful,

proactive planning and investment of time and effort today will yield substantial dividends, guaranteeing that your residents continue to enjoy the same high quality of life during the winter months as they do throughout the year.

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