PREPARING FOR WINTER: PLANNING, COMMUNICATION & EXECUTION

Autumn is my favorite time of year. Cooler temperatures, lower humidity, morning frosts, leaf color changes and the smell of wood burning are some of things that make me love this season.

However with fall comes winter, lurking in the shadows. The advent of winter gives us a whole new set of hazards awaiting us on our mushroom farms and compost operations. Snow and ice present slip, trip and fall hazards that need to be addressed to reduce workplace losses, both personal injuries as well as property damages.

The “keys” to preparing for winter include the following:

Planning > Communication > Execution

Recently, members of the Mushroom Employee Safety and Health (MESH) Committee shared action steps that each of their companies take to prepare for winter weather.

Planning is critical before winter weather arrives. Cristina Castillo, Oakshire Mushroom Farm, shared how they develop an action plan in the event of a potential snow storm. David Bottomley of Kennett Square Specialties reiterated that point and said, “It is important to meet with key individuals to discuss their responsibilities and accountabilities so that everyone knows what their specific role will be. We discuss changes since the previous year that need to be incorporated in this year’s plans. Finally, lessons learned from previous winter seasons are used in developing new action plans.”

Here at South Mill-Champs, in early December, key managers meet to make certain that there is a clear understanding of each person’s
responsibilities. [See side bar of sample Winter Preparedness Meeting Agenda]. This annual planning meeting is essential in establishing accountabilities for effectively and efficiently clearing snow and ice from work areas that protect company employees and contract workers.

Communication is another “key” for preparing for the winter season. Castillo shared how workers at Oakshire are trained how to safely shovel snow as well as how to walk in and on snow and ice areas. At South Mill-Champs, it’s vital for managers to communicate with our building and grounds team to identify operational areas at their respective farms which need to be cleared for employees to work safely, like cleanout and/or filling crews. Amanda Alonso, Laurel Valley Farms, agreed. “Loader operators and maintenance workers communicate with one another constantly in determining which areas are high-priority areas for clearing.”

Execution is the final step. Sometimes it’s as simple as staging bags of salt and ice melt at strategic locations around their farms. While it seems like a small act, according to Scott Wood, Greenwood Mushrooms, “Adequate salt inventories are extremely important.” Many companies will inventory salt supplies so that adequate quantities are available for effective road and walkway coverage. Our company, like many others, has competent building and grounds personnel who work long hours plowing roads, walkways and wharves to remove snow and ice for the safety of the workers.

Another key component of the execution stage is for utility crews to work cooperatively with harvesting teams in clearing those small out-of-the-way areas that all farms have.

Winter can be a hazardous time for many mushroom industry workers; however, the more companies invest in planning, communicating and executing in removing snow and ice, the safer these work operational areas can and will be. mn

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Sample Winter Preparedness Meeting Agenda

Meeting Purpose: To get a clear understanding of snow and ice removal responsibilities for the upcoming winter season

Current Expectations: Farm/area managers are ultimately accountable for snow and ice removal in their respective areas of responsibilities

Building & Grounds Department Responsibilities: Large areas (driveways, wharves, pedestrian walkways, etc.)

Priorities: Parking lots, driveways, pedestrian walkways in front of houses and wharves

Farm Managers’ Responsibilities: Communicate where the cleanout/fill/casing crews will be working

Farm/Area Department Responsibilities: Clear small areas (walkways around entrances and exits, steps, access doors, etc.)

Supplies to Keep On-Hand: Bags, bins of salt or ice melt strategically placed at individual blocks, ergo-shovels, salt spreaders

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