

Snow removers out—before our morning coffee

By Bill Allen

The clock says 2 a.m. The wind chill factor is 50 below zero and the snow is piling up fast in the blowing wind. You don't mind, though, because you're nestled snugly in a nice warm bed. Unless, of course, you work for the UNL Department of Grounds.

"Every employee is on call 24 hours a day, even weekends," said Kirby Baird, City Campus supervisor of the department. This is in addition to their regular hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays.

The reason for all this early morning activity? Snow. The grounds department has to make all walkways, steps, parking lots and some streets on campus navigable by the time the rest of the university population starts using them.

The department has a weather service that alerts it of possible snow about 48 hours in advance, Baird said.

The equipment used by the department includes five snow plows, two dump trucks and pickups for hauling snow away and bringing sand and gravel in, as well as many shovels, according to Don Shew.

Shew, operations manager for the department said he usually likes to wait until most of the snow has fallen and the wind has died down before starting snow removal. Otherwise, the snow would blow back into an area as fast as it is cleared.

Both City and East Campuses are divided into areas which are assigned to an area supervisor who makes sure that area is cleared of snow.

According to Yvonne Sommers, an area supervisor, some areas present greater problems than others.

"The north door of Morrill Hall will be closed from now on," Sommers said, "not only to save energy, but those rounded steps are dangerous because snow and ice collect there."

Other areas cited by the staff as being especially hard to keep clear were the areas around Burnett Hall, Bessey Hall and Oldfather Hall, where a wind tunnel causes snow to collect.

The grounds department on City Campus has 12 full-time employees assigned to snow. There are also a few part-time students who help, Baird said. Five people drive snow plows and the rest remove snow from sidewalks and steps.

According to Baird, because of the limited number of people and limited amount of time for removing the snow, the department advertises for student "call in" help at the beginning of each year.

"The response to the ads this year was the biggest we've ever had," Baird said. "But not that many have showed up to work. City Campus had 68 students sign up to work at the beginning of the year," he said, "after the first snow four actually showed up; after the second, five showed up."

"They just don't realize how hard the work is," Sommers said.

Sommers said most students don't realize the service that the grounds department provides.

"We'll be working in an area and people will look at us like 'What the hell are you doing here?'" Sommers said.

Another area supervisor, Jennifer Hicks, voiced similar views.

"Most people don't seem to realize that the work we do (during snow removal) is directly for their safety," she said.

Icy spots are a problem for the grounds department, according to Baird. After snow becomes firmly packed and the temperature is below freezing, there's not much that can be done about the ice, he said.

"About all we can do is sand and gravel it," Baird said.

According to John Wiltse, assistant to the university general counsel, if a person is injured on an icy spot on campus, that person would have to prove negligence on the part of the university to receive any actual payment for damages.

"They would have to prove that there was a duty to remove it (ice) and if the university had failed to remove it in a reasonable amount of time," Wiltse said.

The university, on the other hand, according to Wiltse, "would ask whether or not that person had exercised the normal care that a person would while walking down the street," he said.



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Arctic-like weather brings frostbite

By Vicki Ruhga

Mittens, coats and hats are essentials for students braving the arctic-like weather that has blasted the Midwest during the last months, according to Dr. Gerald Fleischli of the University Health Center.

"Students need to be concerned about the possibilities of frostbite," Fleischli said. "There seems to be a macho thing where students think they don't need to wear a hat or gloves because 'we're tough.' It's important that students know frostbite is a real thing and it can happen."

Fleischli handled one case of frostbite which fortunately did not result in a loss of finger digits. In 1981, four cases of frostbite were reported to the health center during the winter months. In 1982, three cases have been reported in January alone.

Frostbite occurs when individual cells freeze and swell up. There can be breaking of cell membranes, but not all cells die, Fleischli said. Blood also freezes during frostbite and cuts off the oxygen supply to the cells.

The remedy for frostbite is slow warming in lukewarm water. However, this should not be done unless the person will be able to stay warm. Fleischli said this is

because each refreeze damages the cells, so if a person is stranded he should concentrate on keeping the rest of his body warm, rather than thawing the frozen parts.

Warming frozen areas too rapidly is dangerous because cells may thaw out first and require oxygen, which is still in the frozen blood supply. As a result, the cell dies from lack of oxygen. Another danger is that the frostbite victims have no sensation and can be burned easily by warming excessively.

Fleischli said there have been more sprained ankles and wrists, as well as sore bottoms, because of falls on the ice. However, there have been few broken bones because of ice, he said.

Hypothermia, another result of the cold, is a condition which occurs when the body temperature goes below 80 to 85 degrees and causes the heart to stop beating rhythmically, similar to a heart attack. Although hypothermia has been common across the country, Fleischli said young people are not usually bothered by it, with the exception of those suffering from severe 6 to 12 hour exposure. There were no hypothermia cases reported to the health center in 1981, and so far none in 1982.

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