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LET IT SNOW But help your neighbors by clearing your sidewalks

What to do when it snows? First, shovel your sidewalks. Then look around for neighbors who might need your help.

Shoveling the snow off your sidewalks helps keep Missoula walkable, burns extra holiday calories – and it's the law. The City of Missoula's snow ordinance requires residents to clear sidewalks of snow and ice after a snowfall by 9 a.m. on weekdays and by noon on weekends and holidays.

"We really want residents to be thoughtful about helping each other get around," said Phil Smith, manager of the City's bicycle-pedestrian program.

This year, the City will use a streamlined public notice and communication procedure in response to complaints from residents about slushy, icy and snowy sidewalks. Work by the Bicycle-Pedestrian Advisory Board helped shape the new procedure.

On priority streets, such as Safe Routes to School, City staff members will inspect after snowfalls. On other streets, staff members will respond to complaints. When a sidewalk needs to be shoveled, the staff member will talk with the resident or leave a courtesy notice. If the walk is not cleared upon a return visit 24 hours later, City crews have the authority to clear the walk and bill the resident.

"Property owners and residents have a responsibility to keep their sidewalks accessible so people can walk safely year-round," said Public Works Director Steve King. "City Public Works is the place to report a chronic problem when property owners do not clear their sidewalks."

Residents are encouraged to look out for neighbors. Already, there are several neighborhood groups that step up and clear walks and driveways for people who are unable to clear their own. Residents who would like to volunteer with an existing group or to start a new group can call Neighborhood Liaison Erin Scott at 552-6081.

Missoula residents walk year-round, and snow removal helps keep them safe, said Donna Gaukler, director of Missoula's Parks and Recreation Department.

"Walking and biking to school and work means there are fewer cars on the roads, less pollution and less congestion," she said. "When we walk, we connect with nature and with our neighbors, and we give ourselves a daily dose of exercise."

Clear and safe sidewalks are part of a healthy built environment, said Greg Oliver, Health Promotion Division Director at the Missoula City-County Health Department.

"Many Missoulians are proud of our national reputation as a great active place to live," he said. "People of all ages bundle up and get out in the winter. Cleared sidewalks really help that happen."

To report sidewalks that need attention, please call the Public Works Department at 552-6345. Questions? Please call Phil Smith at 552-6352.

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