

**In this issue of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Listserv –  
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**1. Virtual Manual – Set Up/Update Yours Today**

EHS has created a Virtual Manual tool to help supervisors and employees consolidate safety and compliance information available from EHS that is specific to their work at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The Virtual Manual provides explanatory narrative and links to relevant EHS Safe Operating Procedures, as well as additional information sources.

From the Virtual Manual entry site there are instructions for completing the assessment provided. The combination of subjects you choose during completion of the assessment results in a “profile” identifying areas of information applicable specifically to your workers/work area.

Users are advised to review all linked SOPs, as they are integral to the overall mission of the Virtual Manual - to create a comprehensive safety and compliance manual. When EHS updates information for a subject, either in the Virtual Manual narrative or linked documents, you will automatically see that update the next time you access your custom virtual manual. Every EHS document that is linked within the manual will include a revision date.

As work/research changes you can change the list of subjects you selected and answer the assessment questions again. Then save your updated profile using the same email address.

It is recommended that all staff/students/faculty new to your area review the Virtual Manual you created. If you do not already have a Virtual Manual set up one today. If you already have a Virtual Manual, review it for any needed changes/updates.

## Resources

- Virtual Manual <https://ehs.unl.edu/resources/virtual-manual/>

## 2. Snow Moving Safety Tips

Nationwide, snow shoveling is responsible for approximately 11,500 injuries and as many as 100 deaths each year in the United States according to the National Institutes of Health Library of Medicine. Snow shoveling and/or use of a snow blower present several hazards. Common injuries associated with shoveling include back injuries, slips and falls, and being struck by the shovel. Amputations are the most frequent snow blower injuries. Strenuous physical activity combined with cold weather is a major risk factor for heart attacks according to the American Heart Association, especially for those not regularly participating in strenuous activity. Following are some tips to help keep you safe while moving snow.

Preparation:

- **Dress appropriately.** Wear water-repellent clothing, layered to allow removal of a layer to prevent overheating. Cover your head, hands, and feet with weather-appropriate gear. Wear shoes/boots with slip-resistant soles.
- **Timing matters.** Start snow removal when there is a light covering and repeat. Do not wait for the snow to stop/accumulate. Do not plan to shovel immediately after eating and avoid caffeine before beginning.
- **Clear vision is important.** Be sure your cold weather clothing does not obstruct your vision so you can watch for icy spots/uneven surfaces. Maintain awareness of your surroundings so you do not inadvertently find yourself in a traffic path as vehicles may not have good traction on the snow/ice.
- **Prepare yourself.** Shoveling snow can raise your heart rate and blood pressure. Snow shoveling is an aerobic activity. Warm up before shoveling, stretching as you would for any workout. Walking a few minutes or marching in place is one suggestion for a “warm-up.” Cold, tight muscles are more likely to result in a sprain or strain. If you have a history of heart or other medical problems or do not exercise regularly, check with your doctor before shoveling.

While shoveling:

- **Pace yourself.** Take it slow and stretch before you begin. Take frequent breaks and drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. Stop shoveling immediately if you experience pain or difficulty breathing or become fatigued.
- **Use proper equipment.** Use a shovel that is comfortable for your height and strength. Sometimes a smaller blade is better as it avoids the risks associated with trying to pick up too much snow at once.
- **Start early & shovel often.** Don't wait until the snow stops falling. By shoveling a smaller amount of snow, you can avoid issues due to shoveling packed/heavy snow.
- **Use proper technique.** When gripping the shovel position your hands 12 inches apart. This increases leverage and reduces the strain on your body.
- **Push the snow, if possible. Lift only when necessary. If you must lift, lift properly.**
  - Lift a shovel of snow with your legs and tighten your stomach muscles.
  - Keep your back straight and do not bend at the waist.
  - Scoop small amounts. Walk to where you want to dump the snow.
  - Never remove deep snow all at once, rather shovel an inch or two and repeat.
  - Do not twist your body to shovel or empty the load. Do not throw snow over your shoulder.

If possible, use a snow blower instead of shoveling by hand. However, recognize that a snow thrower presents unique hazards. These are a few tips to help prevent injury when using a snow thrower:

- **Never wear loose pants, jackets, or scarves.** Loose clothing can become entangled in moving parts and pull you in. Wear boots with good traction.
- **Operate snow blowers only when there is good visibility.**
- **Keep your hands away from moving parts!** To resolve jams, shut off the engine and wait more than five seconds to ensure all moving parts are still. Use a solid object to clear the chute.

- **Do not leave the snow blower unattended.** Shut off the engine if you must walk away.
- **Add fuel before starting the machine, never while the engine is running or hot.** Be sure to fuel the snow blower outside, not in a garage, shed or another enclosed area. Do not operate in an enclosed area to avoid being overcome by engine fumes (carbon monoxide).
- **Avoid the engine.** The engine becomes hot during use and can burn unprotected flesh.
- **Use the pull-cord safely.** Hold cord firmly, stand with feet wide apart. Do not force the cord if it does not move freely. Sharply pulling can cause upper body/back injury.
- **Watch the power cord.** For electric snow blowers, remain aware of the power cord location. Entangled/severed power cords can lead to shock or electrocution.
- **Do not remove safety devices and keep hands and feet away from moving parts.** Safety devices, shields, guards, and interlocks are there for operator protection.
- **Watch out for motor recoil.** After the machine is turned off there is a brief recoil of motor and blades.
- **Keep others away, including children.** Snow blowers can pick up and shoot objects such as rocks and other debris with significant force. Take care to properly position the discharge chute to avoid directing snow into the path of others in the area.
- **Wear earplugs.** Gas-powered models typically run about 85 decibels so protect your hearing.
- **Wear goggles.** Protect your eyes from small stones or other items that can be thrown up by a snow blower.
- **Understand the machine.** Read the instruction manual prior to use and be familiar with all features. Do not attempt to operate, repair, or maintain the snow blower without reading the instruction manual.

Use of a snow blower does not make snow removal either effortless or risk-free. Using a snow blower is still physical labor done outdoors in snow and cold. Follow these tips for snow shoveling and using a snow blower to stay safe removing snow.

## General Resources

- *Snow shoveling, cold temperatures combine for perfect storm of heart health hazards.* (n.d.). American Heart Association. <https://newsroom.heart.org/news/snow-shoveling-cold-temperatures-combine-for-perfect-storm-of-heart-health-hazards>
- *Preventing Snow Shoveling Injuries | AmTrust Financial.* (n.d.). AmtrustFinancial. <https://amtrustfinancial.com/blog/small-business/preventing-snow-shoveling-injuries>
- National Safety Council “*Why do People Die Shoveling Snow?*” <https://www.nsc.org/home-safety/tools-resources/seasonal-safety/winter/snow-shoveling>
- *Prevent snow shoveling and snowblowing injuries - OrthoInfo - AAOS.* (n.d.). <https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/staying-healthy/prevent-snow-shoveling-and-snowblowing-injuries/>
- Consumer Reports “*Commonsense tips for safer snow blowing*” <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2013/12/common-sense-tips-for-safer-snow-blowing/index.htm>
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety “*Landscaping – Snow Blower*” [https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety\\_haz/landscaping/snow\\_blowers.html](https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety_haz/landscaping/snow_blowers.html)
- OSHA Winter Weather Hazards/Precautions <https://www.osha.gov/winter-weather/hazards>
- OSHA Protecting Workers from Cold Stress <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3156.pdf>
- *News: The Big Number: Snow shoveling results. . . (The Washington Post) - Behind the headlines - NLM.* (n.d.). NCBI. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/search/research-news/7812/>

### 3. Safety Shorts – Shovel and Snow Blower Safety

The following videos provide tips on safely moving snow, whether shoveling or using a snow blower.

- **Snow Shoveling Safety** (Cleveland Clinic, 2:06 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IMXSElabMM>

- **Easy Snow Shoveling Techniques – LSTraining.com** (LS Training System, 2:26 minutes)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hX6uaTivlcQ>
- **Snowblower Safety** (Grabow Hand to Shoulder Center, 2.47 minutes)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G00z3F\\_lmeY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G00z3F_lmeY)
- **Snow Blower Safety Tips** (Toro, 3:14 minutes)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLp75kUdRDw>

NOTE: Resources are provided for informational purposes only. Publication does not constitute endorsement of a particular company or product or affect current University of Nebraska-Lincoln policies and procedures.

#### **4. Welcome New EHS Staff**

EHS is committed to helping the campus community work safely and in compliance with regulations related to occupational safety, biosafety, radiation safety, environmental protection, and stormwater management. EHS invites you to meet the latest addition to EHS team.

Hello, my name is Lauren Gregurek, and I recently joined EHS as a Biosafety Administrative Coordinator. I graduated with a B.S. in Environmental Science from TCU, in my home state. I work alongside our Biosafety Officers and help ensure that biological research across campus is conducted safely and in compliance with applicable guidelines. I'm glad to play a role in fostering safe, responsible, and innovative research across campus.

#### **5. Biological Safety Cabinet Identification and Use**

Biological Safety Cabinets (BSCs) rely on controlled airflow to protect both the user and the research materials. BSCs are certified annually by a contractor to ensure that they function as designed. Building occupants are notified when BSCs in their area are scheduled for certification. Users must ensure that their BSCs are empty and have been decontaminated in preparation for certification.

During normal use only items essential to the current procedure should be placed inside the cabinet. This practice helps prevent cross-contamination, maintains proper airflow and supports an efficient work environment. Once

a work session is completed, all items must be chemically disinfected with appropriate contact time and all items removed from the BSC. The interior surfaces, including the work area and side panels, should be thoroughly disinfected after each use. These steps help preserve the safety and integrity of the workspace for both current and future users.

### **Resources**

- EHS Safe Operating Procedure **Working in a Biological Safety Cabinet (BSC)** [https://go.unl.edu/sop\\_workinbiosafetycabinet](https://go.unl.edu/sop_workinbiosafetycabinet)
- EHS Safe Operating Procedure **Biological Safety Cabinet Classification and Design** [https://go.unl.edu/sop\\_biosafetycabinetdesign](https://go.unl.edu/sop_biosafetycabinetdesign)

**ADOPT SAFETY AS YOUR ATTITUDE – DON'T LEARN BY ACCIDENT!**

### **Environmental Health and Safety**

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