

Winter Services: Be Prepared for Cold Weather

Temperatures may be soaring and cold weather might seem like a distant memory, but don't be lulled into a false sense of security by the long summer, winter is just around the corner and it's vital to make sure you have your winter service needs in hand.

As with everything in life it's easy to forget your troubles while the sun shines, so it's important to be prepared for cold weather now and avoid making mistakes going forward. Here are some things to keep in mind when preparing for snowfall and other adverse weather conditions.

Is forecasting reliable?

It's important to understand what forecasting tools your gritting service provider is using. You don't want to get caught short with an unexpected drop in temperature, at the same time you don't want to be paying for the service when it's not needed. You should be very wary of the type of weather forecasting system their gritting supplier uses. Any reputable gritting contractor will use a dedicated Road Surface Temperature (RST) forecasting model. However, these tools are only available via



subscription and, other than salt and labour, weather forecasting is likely to be the single biggest investment a gritting contractor will make.

As a result, some gritting companies depend on publicly available air temperature forecast information which is definitely not a reliable forecast for a gritting service. Make sure your service provider is using a recognised RST forecast (DTN's weather intelligence service for example), and more importantly look for evidence that they know how to correctly interpret and the data.

Understand what you're buying

When it comes to gritting services it's sometimes hard to know what you will get. Not all gritting companies offer the same service and, with the exception of the Met Office's Quality Mark (which only measures the quality of the weather forecast used), there is no nationally recognised accreditation for gritting contractors.

This means that anyone can set themselves up as a gritting contractor. Make sure that the supplier you use is reputable. Look at who they are currently working for and get some references. Be aware that some companies out there are just brokers who use a network of subcontractors to deliver the gritting service on site. Although this may not look like a bad thing, it will increase the risk of inconsistent service quality and, as with any subcontracting arrangement, there will inevitably be profit margin on top of profit margin.

Are you covered?



When cold weather arrives and surfaces become icy there is always the danger someone will fall and injure themselves. If this happens you will likely find you have a personal injury claim on your hands. It's important to check the type of insurance cover the gritting contractor offer. Some find innovative ways of avoiding any responsibility by creative use of the words in their terms of business.

Avoid using contractors who limit their liability to the duration of their visit. These companies offer very little protection. If an accident occurs after they have left site (i.e. they have finished gritting and moved on to another site), you will find yourself defending the claim on your own.

The very least you should look for is that your gritting contractor will take an active role in the handling of any personal injury claims. Some may offer more but don't be fooled by those who offer an apparent indemnity from any claims. In practice, such indemnities are not workable and if the claimant thinks that the terms of the contract itself are not sufficient to protect them from harm, then they'll pursue the

client – indemnity or not.

Make sure that your gritting contractor is prepared to take a hands-on role in the event of any claims and check that their T's and C's don't leave you out in the cold!

Always think ahead!

Whether you're looking for a company who offer a nationwide service, or something more localised, there is no shortage of options. To get the best deal, you should be talking to these companies in the summer. That's when they are most keen to get their hands on your business.

In summer, the gritting companies will be ordering their salt, plant and equipment ready for winter and they'll want to be sure that they have enough customers to get the best value from their investment. Whilst it may seem like madness to be talking winter services while the sun is cracking the pavement, that's when you'll get the best deal.

If you wait until the weather changes to look for a service provider you will find yourself paying substantially more and you may not be able to find a supplier who has the capacity to take on the job. So don't leave it late, get your gritting service provider sorted early and save yourself the worry.

Hopefully this advice will prevent you being caught out. Be smart and avoid these common mistakes.