



City of Yakima

Issues Brief

Help Keep Yakima Safe When Winter Weather Hits

Now that the Yakima Valley has had its first real taste of winter weather, it's a good time to remember that it takes everyone pitching in to keep our area as safe as possible when snow or freezing rain make roads and sidewalks slick.



Home owners and business owners need to keep sidewalks near their property clear of snow and ice.

City crews, along with private contractors hired by the City, follow a formal snow removal plan that's focused on keeping streets clear, especially near schools, hospitals, major intersections, and on hills.

But under a City ordinance passed several years ago, home owners and business owners are responsible for making sure sidewalks near their property are free of snow and ice. Shoveling snow before ice has a chance to form makes the job a lot easier. But if ice does build up on a sidewalk, you shouldn't use rock salt to get rid of it.

"The chemicals in rock salt (sodium chloride) tend to make concrete chip and crack," said Yakima Streets and Traffic Operations Manager Joe Rosenlund.

"Calcium or magnesium chloride-based 'hot melts' are a much better option. Hot melts work like rock salt, but are effective over a wider range of temperatures and won't damage sidewalks," said Rosenlund.

Another common problem arises this time of year when some people shovel or blow snow from their sidewalks onto City streets. Doing so is not only unsafe, it's illegal.

"Moving snow from sidewalks out into streets creates a serious hazard for drivers," said Rosenlund. "It's not just a bad idea, it's against the law. Instead of putting snow in the street and hoping a plow will come by, it's a lot better to pile snow from sidewalks in your yard or somewhere else," said Rosenlund. "Anywhere's better than piling it in the road."

Help is available for senior citizens, disabled people, or others who need assistance to remove snow from sidewalks near their property by calling the City's Public Works Department at 575-6005.

For more information about this article, contact Streets and Traffic Operations Manager Joe Rosenlund by phone (575-6005) or by e-mail (joe.rosenlund@yakimawa.gov).

Good Financial Management Keeps City Credit Rating High

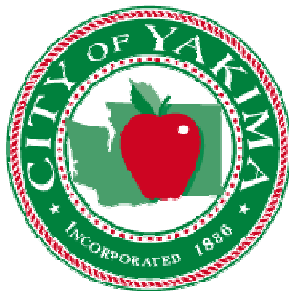
In a recently released ratings report, Standard and Poor's ("S&P") cited the City of Yakima's "Good financial policies and practices..." as one of the main reasons the City will maintain its A+ credit rating for general obligation debt. S&P also described the City's future economic picture as stable.

S&P evaluators wrote in the ratings report, "We believe that good financial management practices and proactive budget planning will continue to support the city's financial stability, and we do not expect to change the ratings during the two-year outlook horizon."



"The fact that we've been able to maintain the A+ credit rating from S&P during some of the most challenging economic times in history speaks highly of how the City has managed its finances," said City Finance Director Cindy Epperson. "The City has been, and continues to be, very disciplined when it comes to budgeting, specifically as it relates to the City living within its means. We have been careful to protect reserves and to maintain a very tight ship," said Epperson. "That hard work has paid off."

A strong credit rating helps the City save taxpayer money because the higher the credit rating is, the lower the interest costs are on bonds that the City sells to pay for major infrastructure projects, equipment purchases, etc. A high credit rating also lowers the cost of insuring bonds that are sold by the City.



S&P last upgraded the City's general obligation debt credit rating from A to A+ in 2008, just about the time the economy in the United States started to decline. In the most recent report on the City's credit rating, which was released on December 10th, S&P evaluators pointed to Yakima's measured approach to finances as being critical to the City keeping the A+ rating.

According to the report, "Key features of the city's approach include a minimum fund balance policy of 16.5% or 60 days of expenditures, and a five-year forecasting and financial planning model that has enabled officials to proactively address future budget concerns."

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Take Steps To Prevent Winter Home Fires

Every winter, the number of home fires increases compared to the rest of the year not only in the Yakima area but across the rest of the United States as well. The Yakima Fire Department, the U.S. Fire Administration ("USFA"), and the National Fire Protection Agency ("NFPA") reach out to homeowners to share a few simple tips that can significantly reduce the number of home fires during the coldest part of the year.

"Winter fires are mostly preventable," said Yakima Fire Department Deputy Fire Marshal Brandon Dorenbush. "A simple common sense approach can go a long way to helping avoid tragedies so that everyone can have a safe winter season."

Each year, the NFPA and the USFA jointly sponsor the *Put a Freeze on Winter Fires* campaign to help raise public awareness about how to avoid home fires this time of year.

Here are a few simple tips that you can follow in order to help prevent winter home fires:



Holiday decorations should be a source of joy, not an ignition source for fires.

- **Choose holiday decorations that are flame retardant or flame resistant**
- **Use indoor Christmas lights inside and outdoor Christmas lights outside**
- **Space heaters need space – Keep anything flammable at least 3 feet away from space heaters**
- **Make sure your live Christmas tree always has enough water**
- **Stay in the kitchen when you're cooking or turn off the stove if you have to leave**
- **Check electrical cords to make sure they are not cracked or damaged – If the cords are cracked or damaged, Throw Them Away!**
- **Don't ever use your stove or oven to heat your house**
- **Keep lit candles away from decorations or other thing that can burn – Blow out lit candles when you leave the room**



According to NFPA statistics, space heaters account for about one-third of all winter home fires and about 80% of deaths caused by winter home fires. The NFPA says that cooking is the leading cause of residential building fires during the coldest part of the year, accounting for 36% of winter fires.

USFA data shows that each winter an estimated 108,400 residential building fires occur in the U.S., resulting in 945 deaths, 3,825 injuries, and approximately \$1.7 billion in property loss.

To learn more about how to prevent winter fires in your home, visit the USFA website at www.usfa.fema.gov/winter and the NFPA website at www.nfpa.org/winter.

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