



Issues Brief

City of Yakima e-Newsletter

Help Keep Yakima Safe When Winter Weather Hits

Cold winter weather has arrived in the Yakima Valley. It won't be long before the first snowfalls of the year blanket the area. So, now is a good time to remember that it takes everyone pitching in to keep Yakima 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.

The City's snow removal plan is focused on keeping streets clear, especially downtown, 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 and driveways onto City streets. Doing so is not only unsafe, it's illegal.

Moving snow from sidewalks and driveways 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 and driveways in your yard or somewhere else, said Rosenlund. Anywhere's better than piling it in the road.



Private contractors, along with City of Yakima crews, help keep streets clear during heavy snow falls.

Help is available for senior citizens, disabled people, or others who need assistance to remove snow near their property by calling the City's Office of Neighborhood Development Services at 575-6101.

✦ 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 Captain Jeff Pfaff. 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:

- **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**



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



Winter home fires, many of which could be prevented, result in more than 900 deaths each year and cause almost \$2 billion in damage.

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.

✦ Santa to Again Share Breakfast at the Harman Center

With Christmas fast approaching, preparations are underway around the world for visits from the Jolly Old Elf himself, Santa Claus. Part of Santa's packed public appearance schedule includes his annual stop at Yakima's Harman Senior Center on Saturday, December 3rd for a special Breakfast With Santa event.



Part of a very busy pre-Christmas schedule for Mr. Claus will be a visit to Yakima's Harman Senior Center on December 3rd.

The man known to many as Father Christmas will spend a couple of hours at the Harman Center greeting people, taking gift requests, and handing out candy canes. Santa is scheduled to be at the Senior Center, which is located at 101 North 65th Avenue, from 8:30 am to 10:00 am that day.

During his visit, everyone will also have the chance to get their picture taken with Mr. Claus. Anyone interested in snapping a photo of themselves with Santa, who will be donning his traditional outfit of a red coat with white collar and cuffs, white-cuffed red trousers, matching hat, and black boots and belt, should bring their own camera or other picture taking device.

It will cost only \$5.00 for the delicious breakfast on December 3rd, which is being sponsored by Yakima Valley Senior Citizens, Inc., a non-profit group that supports activities and programs at the Harman Senior Center.

We are really looking forward to Santa being here on December 3rd for breakfast, said Parks and Recreation Manager Ken Wilkinson. We are already working to get the Harman Center decorated with lots of holiday cheer. On the day of the breakfast, we will have Christmas music playing, the fireplace will be blazing – it will be a lot of fun, said Wilkinson.

People who plan on attending the special Breakfast With Santa event at the Harman Center on Saturday, December 3rd are being asked to make reservations before November 25th. Reservations can be made by calling 575-6166.



Be Part of the Solution!

You can serve your community by becoming part of a citizen board committee, or commission. To learn more, contact the City of Yakima Clerk's office by phone (575-6037) or by e-mail (sonya.claartee@yakimawa.gov).

Yakima is our community – Be Part of the Solution!