



# Winter Brings Maintenance Challenges

*When the chill sets in, be sure to protect vulnerable elements of your facility.*

By Mark Wright

Kenosha, Wisconsin-based Barth Storage got about 100 inches of snow in each of the past couple winters. How high is 100 inches? It's higher than the Olympic record for the high jump (7' 10"). It's almost as high as the tallest man ever recorded by the Guinness Book of World Records (8' 11").

"Luckily, my father owns snow plows," says Lisa Barth-Chiappetta, owner/manager of the 30-year-old family-run business.

Unfortunately, sometimes those vehicles are otherwise engaged, so she has to outsource the task. A typical winter will cost her roughly \$20,000 for snow plowing.

"A lot of storage facilities don't budget for that much," observes Barth-Chiappetta. "If you don't have it budgeted correctly it can really affect you, especially during this difficult economy."

Where does all that snow go? "We usually push it up to the fence," she says, "but if there is too much we have to get it hauled away—which can get really expensive. We have to have the facility plowed out first thing in the morning, but sometimes the wind blows and the snow drifts back, so it's a constant cleanup after storms."

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*A snow plow keeps units accessible following another winter blast at Barth Storage in Kenosha, Wisconsin.*

## From White-Out to Bright Out

About 1,400 miles southeast of Kenosha, storage pros are dealing with a different problem. Instead of too much snow, Florida facilities get too much sun.

The nearly constant blast of solar energy on the Sunshine State means facilities there "have to paint more often, because the sun dries the color right out of it," explains Linnea Appleby, president of Sarasota, Florida-based PDQ Management Solutions.

"In Florida, we tend to prepare for hurricane season like people up north plan for winter," Appleby adds, "so we do our heavy maintenance planning in June instead of later in the year."

One of the details that will get extra attention during the winter months, however, is HVAC, she says. Since winter temperatures in Florida can fluctuate daily from the high 80's down to the 60's, operators want to make sure their HVAC systems are not working overtime or coming on at times when they're not needed.

Appleby notes one other winter chore for Floridians. (Snowbound northerners, cover your eyes.) "We fertilize our grass in February."

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## Speaking of Light

Whatever state you are in, cold weather can often create issues for outdoor lighting and fixtures, says Dan Hengstler, president of Las Vegas, Nevada-based Priority Lighting.

“Low temperature environments can cause adverse performance such as ‘fluttering,’ reduced light output, and difficulties with ballast start up,” he explains. “In these conditions, enclosed fixtures, jacketed lamps, and the newer, more efficient fluorescents can help ensure better performance.”

Hengstler points out that inclement weather will not be kind to loose or defective incandescent lamp sockets. “Water and moisture, along with extreme cold, can corrode and loosen socket connections. If the wire connections to the socket are loosened or corroded, the sockets should be replaced.”

Wall pack fixtures—commonly used in storage facilities—that use metal halide or high pressure sodium lamps can burn out early from exposure to the elements and low temperatures, he says, so he recommends enclosing or covering them for protection.

Re-set timers during winter months to reflect the fewer hours of daylight, advises Hengstler. Also, he encourages the use of LED (light emitting diode) or cold cathode lamps in place of compact fluorescent lights, as the latter “do not

work well or efficiently on timers, dimmers, or motion sensors. LED (light emitting diode) or cold cathode lamps are dimmable, work better, and last longer on timers, although the technology can be ‘pricey,’” he explains.

To get around cost concerns, Hengstler suggests checking with local energy companies for potential subsidies and rebate programs that reduce the expense of replacing older, less efficient bulbs. Plus, he adds, “switching to the new fluorescent tubes, LEDs, compact fluorescents, cold cathodes will produce significant costs savings on the monthly energy bill—not to mention you will be ‘going green.’”

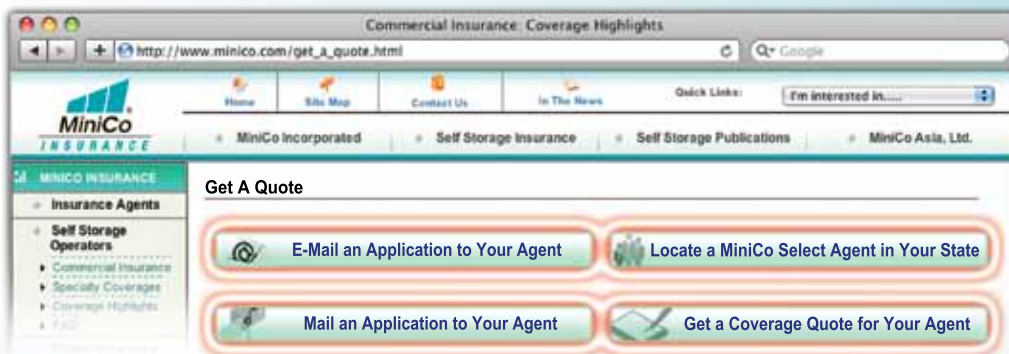
## Look Up

Roofing also needs regular winter attention, advises Kathy Schoch, sales manager for Cleveland, Ohio-based KST Coatings. Pick a mild day and get up there—carefully—to take a closer look. “Walk the roof to check for leaks and properly flowing gutters and downspouts,” she says.

If you find a problem, depending on the type of roof, you should probably consult the manufacturer before launching any repairs. While some materials can be handled by a facility manager or maintenance staff to create a temporary fix, plan to have a roofing professional handle permanent repairs.

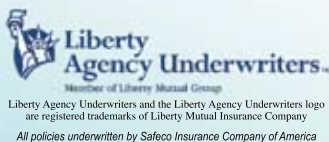
Facilities located in snowy climates have extra worries. “In areas with heavy snow, operators should be concerned with snow loads—the weight of accumulated snow on the

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roof—and identify areas where you might get multiple layers or where snow collects. Be cautious and remove some of it,” suggests Schoch.

“To eliminate snow, shovel with caution so as not to damage the roof. Just get the top layers and weight off—don’t shovel all the way down to the roof. Also, you never want to use an ice pick, because that could damage the roof.

“On a sloped roof or overhang, you’ll typically have snow guards, but if you don’t have them you would want to install them to reduce the risk of snow sliding down.” Get rid of icicles, too.

Winter is a good time for facilities in warmer climates to check their roofs, as well, adds KST Coatings’ brand manager, Keith Krese. “While some climates battle harsh winter weather, it might be an ideal time in places like Phoenix, for example, to do that coating job and roof repair while it’s not real hot.”

## Protect Walls and Doors

Ryan Dorrell, commercial sales manager at CertaPro Painters of Indianapolis, Indiana, echoes that thought. “Depending on where your facility is, winter can have a positive or negative affect on paint and coatings,” he says. “If you are in a warm climate in the West or South, winter is the preferred time to protect/paint your facilities, as the temperatures are ideal for proper curing.”

Coatings and paint, however, can also be susceptible to salt damage. It’s potentially a year-round issue.

“If your facility is within 10 miles of the ocean, you can have salt fog or salt air that will corrode metal, especially during the cold months when the moisture will not dry as quickly,” says Teresa Sedmak, president of Reno, Nevada-based Everbrite Inc.

Winter, of course, brings its own challenges. Facilities in snowy locales where salt is used on the ground to provide vehicle traction and pedestrian safety need to exercise particular vigilance.

“Salt is highly corrosive and will cause deterioration of the coating on the door or walls,” explains Dorrell. “The salt will also cause quick and extensive rust to any exposed metal, especially on doors. Keep the salt to the walks and drives, and don’t get too aggressive or sloppy with the distribution.”

Check the bottoms of doors or metal buildings for corrosion—a rough and bumpy surface is a telltale sign—when salt has been used, suggests Sedmak. “Even if you don’t use salt or chloride products in your facility, cars can carry in salts from the roads and can splash salt onto your buildings. A quality, clear protective coating with resins that are salt resistant can protect metal from further corrosion or can prevent the problem before it starts.”

## Slipping and Sliding Toward Liability

“In cold weather states that receive snowfall, sleet or ice, property owners and managers should be mindful of the liabilities pertaining to slips and falls that could potentially occur at their sites,” counsels Mike Gong, CIC, self storage practice leader at Arthur J. Gallagher Risk Management Services in Fresno, California. “Initiating and following a snow and ice clearing program could go a long way to reduce liability exposure.”

Gong offers these winter maintenance tips:

- Keep walkways, parking areas and entrances well lit at all times.
- Re-position waterspouts so water cannot collect on walkways to form ice.
- Frequently check for re-freezing periods during late afternoons when the temperature goes above freezing and then drops back down below freezing, thus forming “black ice.”
- Floors should always be mopped dry in areas such as entrances where water can accumulate. Caution signs should always be placed in mopped areas or where the floor is wet.
- Salt wheelchair ramp areas frequently to clear any possible ice formation. Ramps should always be accessible to wheelchair users.

In addition to salt, watch out for standing water and piled snow, says Dorrell. “Often times the areas to pile snow are limited, but avoid piling it against any coated surface. The coatings used on storage facilities are not designed to withstand submersion or standing water. Piled snow will cause coatings to blister and peel.”

## Watch that Gate

Back in Kenosha, Barth-Chiappetta is waiting to see if this will be another 100-inch snow year. One thing she already knows: Her hardy tenants won’t care. “We still have some crazy people who come out to pick up stuff from their unit right after a big snow storm,” she says with a smile.

When those cabin-fevered tenants arrive, they’ll come through the gate just like it’s a regular day. That means the gate has to actually work—regardless of the weather.

“You have to worry about your gate,” counsels Barth-Chiappetta. “If it gets too cold out, leave it open so the motor won’t burn out. After a snowfall, make sure you dig out the gate so the motor doesn’t have to work too hard.”

Mother Nature won’t punch-in on the security pad, obviously, so whether a facility is in snowy Wisconsin or sunnier states to the south, maintenance-savvy storage pros will be prepared when she arrives. ❖