

# DEVELOP AN A+ LOS

Know your limitations, client intentions to develop an operational plan



By **MICHAEL WAGNER, CSP**

**T**he snow and ice management industry always places a priority on the level of service (LOS) that's provided to a client.

Many organizations look at components such as:

- Trigger points
- Snow and ice amount thresholds
- Specific site requirements such as size, type, surface material, piling spots, etc.
- Number of personnel along with their qualifications and experience
- The type of equipment to be used
- Materials requested and provided

All these aspects of a sound LOS are necessary, but we must take it a few steps further to be effective and efficient, and to create strong, long-term relationships with clients in which all parties see an extraordinary value. We'll work through different phases in the strategy below for a better understanding how to take our LOS to the next level.

## PHASE 1 Understand your capabilities

Fully understand the capabilities of your organization. This includes components such as the number of personnel, structure, their qualifications and experience; the assets that you manage; how you approach safety; determining the risks you're willing to take on, as well as those you're not; and how you currently manage your snow and ice program.

Without knowing these areas of the organization throughout your process of meeting with clients and developing site requirements, it's going to be extremely difficult to develop a sound action and operational plan come time for snow and ice events.

## PHASE 2 Developing the specifications

Meet with the client to develop the site specifications and put together the contract. You must reflect on Phase 1 in this situation. As you're working with the client and discussing the service they're seeking, you must consider how your organization is going to accomplish its objectives and meet the client's needs.

Do not overcommit you and the company to performing a service that you can't implement or sustain for the duration of the snow season. Whether it's due to a lack of equipment, personnel or experience with a specialty service, know your limitations and only commit to specifications you can successfully adhere to. For standard components of the service specifications, discuss areas such as:

- Lot size, as well as problem areas such as low and high spots, more-shaded versus less-shaded areas, surface material, drain and gutter locations, and piling zones.
- Desired times of service, such as before a business opens at 7 a.m., after the business closes at 6 p.m.,

etc. Whatever the time may be, you want to set specific time and response guidelines.

- Safety concerns, including entrance and emergency exit, fire lanes, hydrants, walking paths and sidewalks from the street, parking lots, or any other areas leading to business entrances, and other high-traffic areas.

- The importance of using specific equipment for the job, as well as liquid and granular materials.

- Enforcing the plan of allowing the snow contractor to determine material usage based on professional experience and qualifications (such as being a CSP or ASM).

- An Emergency Operations Plan for severe storms such as excessive ice, wind, blowing snow, blizzards, etc. Advise the client how you will respond in mild to severe scenarios, and what that service will offer them.

There's a growing list of resources at [my.sima.org](http://my.sima.org) that can help guide you on many of these tasks. If you can't find the answers you're looking for, reach out to the SIMA staff at [info@sima.org](mailto:info@sima.org); and remember that you have a very large network of snow professionals with tremendous experience through SIMA.

## KNOW YOUR OPERATIONAL RISKS

➔ Don't forget to discuss snow operations with your safety professional to look at operational risks. Know these before you develop site requirements with the client so you can be prepared to identify potential hazards as you're developing the specifications. While this isn't an exhaustive list, it can help you get started:

- Increased slip, trip and fall areas
- Areas that may induce thaw and refreeze pooling
- Site drainage zones
- People and/or vehicle traffic at the time of service
- Emergency entrance and exit points, as well as high-traffic areas
- Potential landscaping or parking areas that may be damaged



- Loading docks and ramps
- Utility boxes, lines, equipment
- Site type (such as medical, commercial, residential, etc.)

**PHASE**  
**3** **Implementing an operational plan**

Now it's time to take all your planning work and put it into action. This can be a challenging phase since you're communicating expectations, response plans, personnel and equipment prep, and more, to all of your clients.

It's beneficial to map out how you want to prepare for the season and ensure you're meeting the site specifications by planning processes and response plans with every level of staff from administration, laborers, supervisors, equipment and shop managers, and operational managers. Make sure they understand what's expected of them as far as workload, response times, preparation and performance. Identify areas of potential training, scheduling and improvements to increase your level of preparedness and effectiveness.

Have documented backup plans



that can be referred to in case they are needed. Make sure drivers, operators, laborers and all other staff members are well-informed and prepared to tackle the certain and uncertain roads ahead.

**Continuous improvement**

Don't think that just because your strategy is set for the season and that you have everything in place the way it needs to be, that you won't need to improve in various areas. As a supervisor and manager, listen to those working and dealing with the hustle and bustle of doing exceptional work

for your organization; be innovative and persistent.

Have periodic staff meetings to discuss what went well and what didn't; what ideas people have to improve processes; and more. Finally, listen to the client. When concerns arise, address them collaboratively and find the root cause. Communicate professionally and develop a level of service for the client that lasts. **SB\***

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