

# Helping each other to avoid falls this winter

Dr David Edwards - Public Health, Norfolk County Council

In winter many hospital admissions are due to falls on snow and ice with slips, trips or falls involving ice is often much worse than a regular fall. Falls on ice leave people less prepared so they fall more quickly onto the pavement or walkway.

Across Norfolk some priority pathways in Norwich, Kings Lynn & Great Yarmouth are cleared by councils in addition to roads. After prolonged frost or snow footways main shopping areas and busy urban areas including footways leading to essential industrial establishments, hospitals, important bus routes and schools, and known trouble spots are reactively treated. Community volunteers can also help make their local footpaths safer for vulnerable people and reduce numbers of people severely injured through falls.

## Information for Local District and Parish Councils and Volunteer groups regarding voluntary gritting and clearing of footways:

### 1. The Legal Position

Norfolk County Council (NCC) is the highways authority but if others work on the highway minimum standards must be met as NCC remains liable. **Note: While volunteers can help to grit and clear footways, volunteers should not undertake work on the roads.**

**Snow Clearance:** Sometimes people are concerned that if they help to clear snow they may be liable for third party claims.

1. Anyone who clears snow from outside their own or someone else's property is only potentially liable if their efforts make the pavement less safe than it is with the snow and ice undisturbed and as a result somebody is injured. **In particular do not use hot water (See point 6)**
2. Successful claims are very rare.
3. When Local Councils keep a list of the names of their volunteers, those people are covered under the terms of the County Council's Public Liability Insurance (**See Point 2**).

### 2. Public Liability Insurance – NCC can help

Most Local Councils have Public Liability Insurance, which may well be adequate. However, for hand gritting and clearing of footways, NCC can incorporate a voluntary group's details into our own Public Liability Insurance. Your local council will need to supply NCC with the name and telephone details of your main contact in order to do this.

### 3. Agreement between NCC and the Local Council

All highway work carried out by Local Councils needs to have an agreement in place with NCC and this will be by an exchange of letters. You will need to keep NCC informed of the name and telephone details of the main contact and the people who will be doing the voluntary work.

### 4. Operational advice

Please make sure that all volunteers are aware of the advice contained below (**See point 6**), on precautions to be taken when spreading grit or salt or when clearing snow. Further guidance for snow clearing can be found on the NCC website: [www.norfolk.gov.uk/gritting](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/gritting).

## 5. Grit bins

NCC provides a number of grit bins at known problem areas such as steep hills, dangerous bends, and foot-bridges. Local Councils can purchase their own bins by completing the highways web form 'Report a pothole or other highway problem', which is available on the home page of [www.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk) and this will be added to the list of bins that they fill once the location is agreed. Refills can be requested using the web form above or by calling 0344 800 8009.

To support voluntary path gritting your local council will need to locate grit bins in suitable positions on the road network. NCC will fill these bins with a mixture of salt/grit free of charge. They are filled in December and, if necessary, once more by early February. NCC does not fill privately owned grit bins.

## 6. Advice for volunteers spreading salt/grit or clearing snow from footways as part of a Local Council arrangement

- All volunteers must wear a high visibility long sleeved vest or jacket and warm clothing and stout / waterproof footwear which provides good grip. Physical work warms up the body so be prepared to shed layers that you can then quickly put back on once you stop work and start to quickly cool down.
- Ensure that someone is aware that you are carrying out this work, how long you expect to be and make sure you advise them of your return.
- Assess the location before commencing work. Do not attempt path gritting or clearing if you feel conditions would make this unsafe. For example if visibility is poor, traffic flows are too high or conditions are so severe that you would be at risk of falling or extreme cold.
- Always be aware of traffic. Remember the conditions may mean that traffic will have difficulty stopping. Try to work in pairs so that someone can observe the traffic.
- Use the grit sparingly and thinly. Spread a small amount on a shovel and sprinkle gently, one shovel should be able to cover 3-4 square metres. The salt will help to speed up the process of thawing and the grit helps to provide grip on the surface of compacted snow or ice.
- When spreading salt/grit on footways it is better to remove most of the snow first and then spread the salt/grit mixture.
- **DO NOT USE HOT WATER.** Although this melts the snow, it will replace it with black ice, increasing the risk of injury.
- For shovelling snow, use a shovel with the widest blade available. Make a line down the middle of your path first, so you have a safe surface to walk on. Then you can shovel the snow from the centre to the sides.
- If salt is not available from the grit bin, you may need to consider spreading some ordinary table salt on the area you have cleared to prevent any ice forming in the short term. Ordinary salt will work and can be purchased cheaply from local shops, but please avoid spreading it on plants or grass.
- Care should be taken to avoid blocking access points to properties, driveways and paths, especially at pedestrian crossings. The cleared snow should be deposited in the verge or areas that are not used by pedestrians or vehicles.
- Please take the needs of pedestrians into account when working on the footway.
- If you decide to discontinue the voluntary service please inform Norfolk County Council as soon as possible.

**Equipment:** You might want to consider buying from local suppliers to help you deliver a voluntary path clearing service:

- Hi Visibility long sleeve vest/ Hi Visibility jacket.
- Grit Bin obtained and located through local council (see above).
- Push along footway spreader/Plastic shovel/Plastic snow pusher.
- Push along footway grit spreader/Wheel barrows.