

WINTER SAFETY

Don't shovel into injuries

Originally published in *The Blade* on Monday, December 22, 2008

BY RYAN E. SMITH
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Winter is finally here and it's not messing around. Neither should you.

But before you go running out to shovel your driveway or fire up the snowblower, make sure you know what you're doing.

"That's the most important thing. Being prepared goes a long way to having a safe snow season," says Jason Cameron, the TV personality from the DIY Network and a Toledo native. "A big reason why some people end up in the hospital is trying to do too much."

That can start with something as simple as a shovel. Make sure you use it properly, throwing snow forward instead of lifting and twisting.

"[It] is going to save your back in the long run," says Mr. Cameron, the host of such shows as *Desperate Landscapes*, *Man Caves*, and *Project Extreme*.

Dr. Chris David, chief resident in emergency medicine at St. Vincent Mercy Medical Center, adds that it's important to use the right sized-tool as well. A shovel should not be too short, forcing the user to bend too much. Ergonomically designed ones with bent handles can ease this problem.

"[People] shouldn't have a full bend when they're doing the actual shoveling," he says. "The more legs they can use ... the better to prevent back strain and injury."

He suggests that shovelers pace themselves, take multiple breaks, and cover every last inch of exposed skin to protect from frostbite. People predisposed to heart disease could induce a heart attack by overdoing it and should stop immediately if they experience shortness of breath or chest pain.

One alternative to all of this would be to toss away the shovel altogether and try a different tool.

"The easiest thing on your body is a snowblower," says Bob Kiss, owner of East Side Ace Hardware on Consaul Street.

Still, users shouldn't forget the most basic safety precautions, such as not sticking their hands into the machine when there's an obstruction or other problem.

"When there are snowblower accidents, they are really, really severe. It usually involves limbs," Dr. David says. "Don't let kids operate them and stay away from the front of the snowblower."

Once the initial piles of snow are gone, you want to keep them that way, right? In addition to traditional rock salt, more environmentally friendly alternatives have started to gain traction with some consumers. While more expensive, they melt at lower temperatures and are meant to be safer for surrounding vegetation, according to Mr. Kiss.

"It's become more popular," Mr. Kiss says. "It's a nice alternative."

If none of these sound like good advice for you, maybe you could maneuver yourself into a situation like the 39-year-old Mr. Cameron, who now lives in a condo in New Jersey.



SHOVELING TIPS

- Pace yourself. Take multiple breaks.
- Dress appropriately. Cover as much exposed skin as possible.
- Do not use a shovel that is too short or makes you bend too much.
- Throw snow forward. Don't lift and twist.

"The shoveling aspect of it is taken care of," he says.

Contact Ryan E. Smith at: ryansmith@theblade.com or 419-724-6103.

[< previous](#)

[next >](#)