The leaves are falling and autumn is officially here! It’s time to clear our sidewalks and start preparing for winter weather

by Ethan Bancroft on October 15, 2021

What you need to know:

- In autumn, we all need to do our part to keep our sidewalks, planting strips, and gutters clear where we live or own a business.

- Even though it seems like winter is still far away – it’s important to get ready now for snowy, icy conditions before they arrive.

This time of year, it’s everyone’s responsibility to help clear fallen leaves to prevent the sidewalk from being a slipping risk when it gets wet or becomes frozen.

Clearing away leaves keeps the sidewalk safe and accessible so that everyone can travel, particularly people who have accessibility needs or have a harder time getting around. It’s not only the neighborly thing to do – it’s also the law. The area between your curb and property line, including sidewalks, planting strip areas, and vegetation, is your responsibility to maintain.

Don’t forget about unblocking clogged gutters! If a drain is blocked and rainwater water can’t properly drain, the area that people walking and rolling use, particularly at the bottom of curb ramps, can become flooded. This makes the curb ramp difficult or impossible for manual wheelchairs to use. So please remember, when you’re clearing leaves, please make sure that they don’t end up in the gutter. It’s best to put leaves in your green food and yard bins.

For more information on how, when, and where to rake your leaves and clean up your property, check out this SDOT blog post.

Even though winter is still a couple months away, it’s important to get ready now for these snow and icy winter weather conditions before they arrive.
As we've noted, winter in Seattle can bring heavy rain, high winds, ice, and snow (remember the big snowstorm last winter?). We prepare for the snow year-round. We work to keep the roads clear of everything from fallen trees and branches to snow and ice, fix potholes so that the roads are smooth, and repair signs and signals throughout the City. We also monitor conditions to make sure that you stay safe when winter storms are approaching. Our crews are ready to go to work when high winds, heavy rain, or snow and ice are in the forecast! We also make sure that our supplies of salt and liquid anti-icer are stocked and ready to deploy.

We're getting ready, and so should you! Here's what you can do to prepare – and be ahead of the game – before the storms hit:

- Get familiar with Seattle's snow routes. These are the streets that we prioritize clearing, so they are the safest way to get where you need to go. Once it snows, use this online Storm Response Map to see real-time updates of which roads SDOT has plowed and live camera feeds of current road conditions.
- Talk to your neighbors to see who may need help with mobility during a storm and make a plan to ensure that all the sidewalks on the block get shoveled. If you'll need help clearing your driveway and sidewalk, think about who you can ask for help.
- Stock up on warm clothes, extra blankets, and flashlights, before they're in high demand.
- Get a snow shovel and bag of street salt to clear snow and ice.
- Make sure you have first aid kits and a three-day supply of food, water, and medicine.

Here is a friendly safety reminder from Seattle Parks and Recreation:

“In the event of a heavy storm, especially those with strong gusts of wind, please stay out of heavily wooded areas.”

–Seattle Parks and Recreation

Here are a few “Tree Tips” from Seattle City Light:

With most of the leaves fallen, now is a great time to examine the structure of your trees. Here are a few tips of what to watch out for:

- Look for broken or cracked branches that could fall during a windstorm.
- Keep an eye out for tree branches brushing against power lines.
- Remember to stay away from downed power lines. If you do encounter downed power lines, call 9-1-1 immediately.

If your trees could cause safety problems with power lines, contact Seattle City Light Vegetation Management online seattle.gov/city-light/in-the-community/vegetation-management or call (206) 386-1733 to have your concerns assessed. Once you know your trees are safe, you can enjoy their outlines against our beautiful winter sunsets!

Visit seattle.gov/transportation/winterweather for more tips and information on winter weather. Additional resources and information about the City's overall winter storm response is also available at seattle.gov/winterweather.

Thank you for your interest and efforts to help us get ready this year – everyone working together to prepare makes a huge difference to improving safety and mobility during these rare, but significant, winter storm events.