

Dirty Jobs in Government: Snow Removal

Wayne Hanson | May 31, 2013



What superhero would be good at clearing snow? “Lower Back Man,” said Nick Lowe, a senior editor of *X-Men* comic books at Marvel Comics in a *New York Times* article. But for non-superheroes, snowblowers and heated driveways might defeat Mr. Freeze.

Meanwhile, Gotham must employ different tools. Blading snow onto the shoulder or into parking spaces is the first line of defense, but for a big snowfall, the stuff must be disposed of before it chokes off streets. Hauling it away is expensive, and dumping it into waterways puts road crud into the water.

Enter the Dragon, breathing diesel fire to melt snow, filter it and send it retreating into storm drains. One such machine can handle 30 tons of snow per hour and will save on trucking costs, even though it uses 40-50 gallons of diesel per hour for heating. Even the Russian winter — which defeated both Napoleon and Hitler — is now yielding to the heavy fist of jet-engine snow blowers.

When it comes to winter campaigns, lots of new technology has been enlisted in the fight against the white menace, which in 2005 cost New York City \$1 million per inch.

Automated vehicle locator technology, for example, tracks where plows have been and whether the blade was up or down. GPS enables efficient deployment of snowplows and lets residents follow what's happening as well as claim sidewalks for clearing. Real-time operations centers help monitor weather, road temperatures, snow or slush accumulation and other factors to help design the most effective response to storms.

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Photo courtesy of the Colorado Department of Transportation. [Read about more dirty jobs in government](#)

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