



Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs  
**Department of Environmental Protection**

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## **Wetlands Program Guidance**

### **Snow Disposal Guidance**

December 2020

Updated January 2026 for accessibility and contacts



Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection  
Wetlands Program

**Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection  
Bureau of Water Resources  
Snow Disposal Guidance**

**Effective Date:** December 11, 2020

**Applicability:** Applies to all federal, state, regional and local agencies, as well as to private businesses.

**Supersedes:** Bureau of Resource Protection (BRP) Snow Disposal Guideline No. BRPG97-1 issued December 12, 1997 and BRPG01-01 issued March 8, 2001; Bureau of Water Resources (BWR) snow disposal guidance issued December 21, 2015 and December 12, 2018.

**Approved by:** Kathleen Baskin, Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Water Resources

**PURPOSE:** To provide guidelines to all government agencies and private businesses regarding snow disposal site selection, site preparation and maintenance, and emergency snow disposal options that are protective of wetlands, drinking water, and water bodies, and are acceptable to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), Bureau of Water Resources.

**APPLICABILITY:** These Guidelines are issued by MassDEP's Bureau of Water Resources on behalf of all Bureau Programs (including Drinking Water Supply, Wetlands and Waterways, Wastewater Management, and Watershed Planning and Permitting). They apply to all federal agencies, state agencies, state authorities, municipal agencies and private businesses disposing of snow in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Finding a place to dispose of collected snow poses a challenge to municipalities and businesses as they clear roads, parking lots, bridges, and sidewalks. While MassDEP is aware of the threats to public safety caused by snow, collected snow that is contaminated with road salt, sand, litter, and automotive pollutants such as oil also threatens public health and the environment.

As snow melts, road salt, sand, litter, and other pollutants are transported into surface water or through the soil where they may eventually reach the groundwater. Road salt and other pollutants can contaminate water supplies and are toxic to aquatic life at certain levels. Sand washed into

Waterbodies can create sand bars or fill in wetlands and ponds, impacting aquatic life, causing flooding, and affecting our use of these resources.

There are several steps that communities can take to minimize the impacts of snow disposal on public health and the environment. These steps will help communities avoid the costs of a contaminated water supply, degraded

waterbodies, and flooding. Everything that occurs on the land has the potential to impact the Commonwealth's water resources. Given the authority of local government over the use of the land, municipal officials and staff have a critically important role to play in protecting our water resources.

The purpose of these guidelines is to help federal agencies, state agencies, state authorities, municipalities and businesses select, prepare, and maintain appropriate snow disposal sites before the snow begins to accumulate through the winter. Following these guidelines and obtaining the necessary approvals may also help municipalities in cases when seeking reimbursement for snow disposal costs from the Federal Emergency Management Agency is possible.

## **RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES**

These snow disposal guidelines address: (1) site selection; (2) site preparation and maintenance; and (3) emergency snow disposal.

### **1. SITE SELECTION**

The key to selecting effective snow disposal sites is to locate them adjacent to or on pervious surfaces in upland areas or upland locations on impervious surfaces away from water resources and drinking water wells. At these locations, the snow meltwater can filter into the soil, leaving behind sand and debris which can be removed in the spring. The following conditions should be followed:

- Within water supply Zone A and Zone II, avoid storage or disposal of snow and ice containing deicing chemicals that has been collected from streets located outside these zones. Municipalities may have a water supply protection land use control that prohibits the disposal of snow and ice containing deicing chemicals from outside the Zone A and Zone II, subject to the Massachusetts Drinking Water Regulations at 310 CMR 22.20C and 310 CMR 22.21(2).
- Avoid storage or disposal of snow or ice in Interim Wellhead Protection Areas (IWPA) of public water supply wells, and within 75 feet of a private well, where road salt may contaminate water supplies.
- Avoid dumping snow into any waterbody, including rivers, the ocean, reservoirs, ponds, or wetlands. In addition to water quality impacts and flooding, snow disposed of in open water can cause navigational hazards when it freezes into ice blocks.
- Avoid dumping snow on MassDEP-designated high and medium-yield aquifers where it may contaminate groundwater.
- Avoid dumping snow in sanitary landfills and gravel pits. Snow meltwater will create more contaminated leachate in landfills posing a greater risk to groundwater, and in gravel pits, there is little opportunity for pollutants to be filtered out of the meltwater because groundwater is close to the land surface.

- Avoid disposing of snow on top of storm drain catch basins or in stormwater drainage systems including detention basins, swales or ditches. Snow combined with sand and debris may block a stormwater drainage system, causing localized flooding. A high volume of sand, sediment, and litter released from melting snow also may be quickly transported through the system into surface water.

### *Recommended Site Selection Procedures*

It is important that the municipal Department of Public Works or Highway Department, Conservation Commission, and Board of Health work together to select appropriate snow disposal sites. The following steps should be taken:

- Estimate how much snow disposal capacity may be needed for the season so that an adequate number of disposal sites can be selected and prepared.
- Identify sites that could potentially be used for snow disposal, such as municipal open space (e.g., parking lots or parks).
- Select sites located in upland locations that are not likely to impact sensitive environmental resources first.
- If more storage space is still needed, prioritize the sites with the least environmental impact (using the site selection criteria, and local or MassGIS maps as a guide).

### *Snow Disposal Mapping Assistance*

MassDEP has an online [Snow Disposal Mapping Tool](#) to assist in identifying possible locations to potentially dispose of snow. MassDEP encourages municipalities to use this tool to identify possible snow disposal options. The tool identifies wetland resource areas, public drinking water supplies and other sensitive locations where snow should not be disposed.

## **2. SITE PREPARATION AND MAINTENANCE**

In addition to carefully selecting disposal sites before the winter begins, it is important to prepare and maintain these sites to maximize their effectiveness. The following maintenance measures should be undertaken for all snow disposal sites:

- A silt fence or equivalent barrier should be placed securely on the downgradient side of the snow disposal site.
- Wherever possible maintain a 50-foot vegetated buffer between the disposal site and adjacent waterbodies to filter pollutants from the meltwater.
- Clear debris from the site prior to using the site for snow disposal.

- Clear debris from the site and properly dispose of it at the end of the snow season, and no later than May 15.

### **3. SNOW DISPOSAL APPROVALS**

Proper snow disposal may be undertaken through one of the following approval procedures:

- Routine snow disposal – Minimal, if any, administrative review is required in these cases when upland and pervious snow disposal locations or upland locations on impervious surfaces that have functioning and maintained stormwater management systems have been identified, mapped, and used for snow disposal following ordinary snowfalls. Use of upland and pervious snow disposal sites avoids wetland resource areas and allows snow meltwater to recharge groundwater and will help filter pollutants, sand, and other debris. This process will address the majority of snow removal efforts until an entity exhausts all available upland snow disposal sites. The location and mapping of snow disposal sites will help facilitate each entity's routine snow management efforts.
- Emergency Certifications – If an entity demonstrates that there is no remaining capacity at upland snow disposal locations, local conservation commissions may issue an Emergency Certification under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection regulations to authorize snow disposal in buffer zones to wetlands, certain open water areas, and certain wetland resource areas (i.e. within flood plains). Emergency Certifications can only be issued at the request of a public agency or by order of a public agency for the protection of the health or safety of citizens, and are limited to those activities necessary to abate the emergency. See 310 CMR 10.06(1)-(4). Use the following guidelines in these emergency situations:
  - Dispose of snow in open water with adequate flow and mixing to prevent ice dams from forming.
  - Do not dispose of snow in salt marshes, vegetated wetlands, certified vernal pools, shellfish beds, mudflats, drinking water reservoirs and their tributaries, Zone IIs or IWPA's of public water supply wells, Outstanding Resource Waters, or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.
  - Do not dispose of snow where trucks may cause shoreline damage or erosion.
  - Consult with the municipal Conservation Commission to ensure that snow disposal in open water complies with local ordinances and bylaws.
- Severe Weather Emergency Declarations – In the event of a large-scale severe weather event, MassDEP may issue a broader Emergency Declaration under the Wetlands Protection Act which allows federal agencies, state agencies, state authorities, municipalities, and businesses greater flexibility in snow disposal practices. Emergency Declarations

typically authorize greater snow disposal options while protecting especially sensitive resources such as public drinking water supplies, vernal pools, land containing shellfish, FEMA designated floodways, coastal dunes, and salt marsh. In the event of severe winter storm emergencies, the snow disposal site maps created by municipalities will enable MassDEP and the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) in helping communities identify appropriate snow disposal locations.

If upland disposal sites have been exhausted, the Emergency Declaration issued by MassDEP allows for snow disposal near water bodies. In these situations, a buffer of at least 50 feet, preferably vegetated, should still be maintained between the site and the waterbody. Furthermore, it is essential that the other guidelines for preparing and maintaining snow disposal sites be followed to minimize the threat to adjacent waterbodies.

Under extraordinary conditions, when all land-based snow disposal options are exhausted, the Emergency Declaration issued by MassDEP may allow disposal of snow in certain waterbodies under certain conditions. ***A federal agency, state agency, state authority, municipality or business seeking to dispose of snow in a waterbody should take the following steps:***

- Call the emergency contact phone number [(888) 304-1133] and notify the MEMA of the municipality's intent.
- MEMA will ask for some information about where the requested disposal will take place.
- MEMA will confirm that the disposal is consistent with MassDEP's Severe Weather Emergency Declaration and these guidelines and is therefore approved.

During declared statewide snow emergency events, MassDEP's website will also highlight the emergency contact phone number [(888) 304-1133] for authorizations and inquiries. For further non-emergency information about this Guidance you may contact your MassDEP Wetlands Circuit Rider or the MassDEP Regional Office Service Center:

**Northeast (Woburn): 978-694-3200**  
**Southeast (Lakeville): 508-946-2714**  
**Central (Worcester): 508-792-7650**  
**Western (Springfield): 413-784-1100**