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Forget the Snow – Prepare for the Runoff

Rapid melt could create problems for homeowners

Brookfield, Wis. – Unseasonably warm temperatures and even rain will combine this week to make the “Groundhog Day Blizzard” seem like a distant memory, and the results could pose unwelcome challenges for many homeowners.

The biggest problem will be accumulating water from the rapid snow melt, said Todd Ruedt, owner of Grounds Maintenance Services, Brookfield. With the ground frozen and surviving snow drifts blocking drainage, runoff water might find its way into unwelcome locales and create safety or structural hazards. For example, dangerous black ice could form on sidewalks, driveways and parking lots as temperatures dip below freezing at night, Ruedt said.

“We face unique conditions for this time of year,” he explained. “The snow is melting early, but large snow mounds are preventing normal drainage. Homeowners should proactively try to prevent water from accumulating along foundations or in areas where it could pose safety issues.”

Large snow piles are common alongside driveways and homes, remnants of huge drifts created in the Feb. 2 storm. If they know the drainage patterns on their properties, homeowners can shovel out paths to allow water to escape. Nearby storm sewer grates should be checked and cleared, Ruedt said.

“Water flows off everybody’s property to somewhere,” he said. “The key is to know the direction of that natural flow, and to open up a path for the water to get to its destination.”

Sump pumps and gutter downspouts are important elements in managing snow melt runoff. Most sump pumps have sat inactive for months, so homeowners should check that they will work when needed. Sump pump drainage lines can be inspected to ensure they are properly connected and not frozen, which can cause damaging backups.

Similarly, ice frozen inside gutter downspouts can cause backups and spill water directly along a home’s foundation. Snow piled around the end of a downspout actually serves as insulation, so clearing it away can allow ice within to melt. Removing snow from low areas along a foundation where water collects is also a good idea, Ruedt said.

Founded in 1999, Grounds Maintenance Services offers a full spectrum of landscaping and yard maintenance services, plus winter snow management, holiday lighting setup and in-home Christmas tree delivery. Its professional staff prides itself on helping homeowners grow their dreams, one yard at a time.

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