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Plant Ops works round the clock

By Afton Kuykendall

We all know what it's like: hearing a forecast for snow and praying the College will find it in its heart to cancel class.

But we also know the snow usually comes as expected and school is still in session, crushing our hopes for a day off.

This leaves us in a battle of man vs. nature as we climb through snowdrifts and cautiously skate over icy spots on our way to class.

It seems this winter is shaping up to be a particularly slippery one for Etown. As an indication of the weather, we can expect the snowfall in February to average 9.2 inches for Elizabethtown, according to The Northeast Regional Climate Center.

Mother Nature has the grounds crew here at Etown working from the wee hours of the morning into the night in an effort to clear the campus of snow and ice.

"I think we're doing okay," said Scott Nissley, grounds and facility manager.

So far the Facilities Management's plan has been to allow snow to accumulate in order to keep the freezing rain from hitting the ground and to make clearing the ground easier. This also provides for traction on top of any pre-existing ice.

Then they remove the mix of snow and ice as soon as the storm is over. The next step is to apply ice-melting material and use the small ploughs to clear high traffic areas around campus. If conditions worsen, the ice-melting material is spread farther throughout campus to create mixture of ice and snow that will be removed after the storm has concluded.

Winter storms can be costly for Plant Operations. Nissley remembers a particular storm last year in February which cost an estimated \$20,000.

According to Nissley, the College has recently switched ice melting products. The new ice melting product is called Magic Salt. It contains a combination of

sodium chloride (a.k.a. rock salt) and an agricultural byproduct.

The new product is not only a better bargain, but it can withstand temperatures of minus 35 degrees. The chemicals are completely non-toxic, non-corrosive and safe for the plants, animals and people on campus.

"Magic Salt is about \$10.00 per pound and we have 2,200 pounds stocked up," noted Nissley.

"We can't predict the storms we will get, so we haven't stocked too much. But we have never had a problem getting it from the supplier when we need it."

Along with the chemicals, paths and sidewalks are also cleared with small snowplows. Unfortunately, only one of these is currently operational.

A new feature Plant Ops is providing the campus with this year is the email storm notices. "I have gotten a lot of positive responses to them so far," said Nissley.

Junior Lauren DeFont stated, "The emails sound like they're trying to keep us informed, but there are still a lot of slippery places when I'm walking on certain paths at night."

"I haven't had a really big problem with the snow this year," said senior Courtney Lockard. "However, they seem understaffed, but are doing the best they can with what they're working with."

Nissley stated, however, "I don't necessarily feel we are understaffed. The grounds crew could always use more help, but most people have been satisfied with the timeliness and quality of our work. More people would only mean we could get the job done faster."

Facilities Management advises students to bundle up in warm clothing and wear proper seasonal footwear with sturdy treads or shoes with cleats. However, cleats should not be worn inside.