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Lawn & Landscape



State of the **SNOW LABOR MARKET**

Snow and ice company owners give an update on status of hiring and retention of employees.



Mark Klossner
VP Marketing, BOSS Snowplow

“THE FOCUS FOR ANY SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS IS PRODUCTIVITY, GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR INVESTMENTS IN EQUIPMENT AND PEOPLE.”

Brains and brawn

The “winterless” year that we all just experienced was both unusual and impactful for manufacturers, dealers and snow and ice contractors across the country. The good news: all indications are that this winter will be an active one for many areas. It’s time to get back on the path to profit and productivity!

The focus for any successful business is productivity, getting the most out of your investments in equipment and people. On the equipment side, the need for products that help you run your business in an efficient and reliable manner is more important than ever. Increasingly, contractors are looking for even more capabilities with the products that “help me manage my business.”

Smart Connected Products (SCP) have found their way into many industries and homes. Next up, and soon, they will be integrated into the snow and ice industry. As costs of doing business continue to rise, products that give you insights into critical information, such as material usage (salt and brine) and record of application, will become the expectation.

In the next few years, you will begin to see new products from BOSS Snowplow that will give you insights into your equipment and material usage like you’ve never had before. You will be able to make informed decisions, without guessing, and make the changes needed to maximize your productivity and improve your bottom line. It will be the ideal mix of brains and brawn.

We’re excited about the future of these products and the positive impact they will have on your business. They’ll help to improve your ROI and reduce the stress you have running a weather-driven business. We are committed to not only the products but also to the education on how to operate and utilize them, both for business owners and operators. We look forward to serving you during this evolutionary period in the snow and ice industry!

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THE ALL-IN-ONE SIDEWALK WARRIOR

Snowrator® and SR MAG are the right-size solutions for all your snow and ice business needs. Designed to pair versatility with force, these solutions are equipped with the tools you need and the accessories you want to clear the sidewalks you service.

Accessories sold separately.



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LABOR SAVER

The Snowrator® and SR MAG never call in sick. End your shoveling labor headaches!



TIME SAVER

Brine, spread and plow at the same time to maximize on-the-job productivity and profitability.

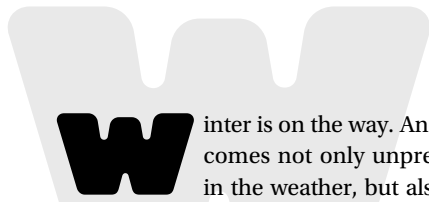


MONEY SAVER

Maximize on-the-job profitability and reduce labor costs.

DOING MORE WITH LESS

A lack of snow, and a lack of labor, has made providing snow removal services even more difficult for some companies. **By Kim Lux**



Winter is on the way. And with that comes not only unpredictability in the weather, but also with the labor market within the green industry. At a time when most are laying off a majority of employees, some are still needed to effectively offer snow removal services.

Contractors from various parts of the country weigh in are where they are with snow season preparations and what they're doing to find quality workers this winter.

"It's not for the faint of heart," says James Hornung Jr., president of Elbers Landscape Services in Buffalo, New York. "It's not an easy way to make a living. It is absolutely a challenging business to get into and a challenging business to thrive in."

WAVERING WINTER WEATHER. In Finksburg, Maryland, Kevin Wallett, president of BHK Lawn Maintenance, says they haven't seen a White Christmas in a while. That lack of snow is starting to impact his bottom line.

"The last few seasons have been terrible," Wallett says. "We don't really get any snow here anymore. We used to get a lot of snow. We haven't had a significant snowstorm, of any kind of volume, since 2016."

"These past couple of seasons, we've been down about \$400,000 to \$500,000 in salting and ice control," he adds. "That's hard to make up for in our industry."

While there's been plenty of snow at times up in Buffalo, New York, Hornung Jr. notes the sporadic nature and irregularity of it has made providing snow and ice removal even more difficult.

Today with labor demands increasing, how likely are you to add mechanized and/or autonomous equipment to you fleet?

MORE LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	NO CHANGE
58%	12%	30%



Markets like Buffalo, New York, can get up to three feet of snow at one point, and then none for the rest of the season, which can make staffing difficult.



“We do in fact get more snow, but we get a lot more unpredictability and that’s **a lot more challenging to staff for.**”

– James Hornung Jr., president of Elbers Landscape Services

“For us, the challenge is the snow is a lot more unpredictable than in other markets, so we do in fact get more snow, but we get a lot more unpredictability and that’s a lot more challenging to staff for,” he says. “You never know about the severity of a snow, but we also struggle at times with the consistency. If it snowed two or four inches every week — it’d be fine. You could hire people, and you could staff accordingly. Unfortunately, one week we might get three feet of snow and then not get another inch for over a month.”

Wallett says he’s expecting another lackluster year in terms of snow in the Mid-Atlantic.

“They are saying not good here,” he says of this winter’s predictions. “It’ll be mild

WORKING HARDER TO NOT WORK SO HARD

FINDING QUALITY LABOR for the snow removal seasons remains touch-and-go — though companies are making more of an effort to recruit and retain top talent.

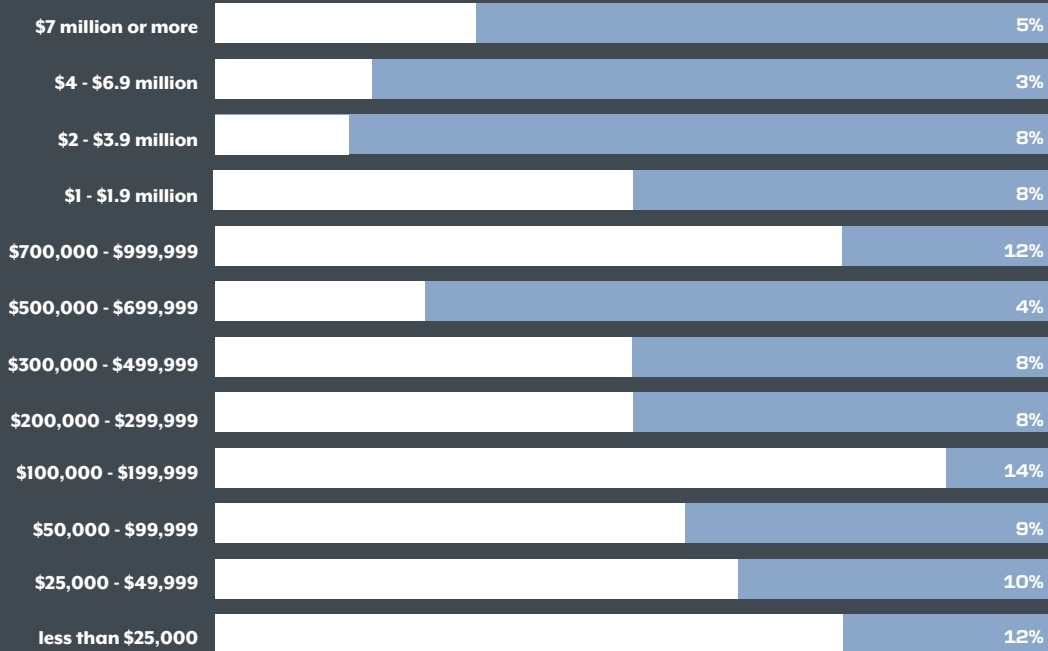
Compared to last year’s State of the Snow Labor Market Report, the number of respondents who have a recruitment strategy in place rose from 38% to 47%. Companies are not only paying new hires more, but also utilizing social media and referral programs to find labor.

That hard work seems to be paying off, as 69% respondents say they’re confident they’ll be fully staffed for Winter 2024-25, while 39% say they need to fill between one and five more open positions.

And if the labor force lessens, there are always new machines and technology helping to ease the load. This year’s report shows 58% of respondents are likely to add mechanized and/or autonomous equipment to their fleet.

**These results are from more than 100 respondents. Not all percentages add up to 100% due to rounding.*

What was your Winter 2023-24 snow and ice revenue?



with less than average snowfall. I don't expect it to be great, but we always hope and pray that maybe we'll get one big snowstorm. That's what happened in 2016 — it didn't snow all year and then with that one snowstorm we got 26 inches. We did all of our work at one time."

SUBCONTRACTORS STICKING AROUND. But when the flakes do fly, having staff already on hand is mission critical. And first things first — knowing where to find them.

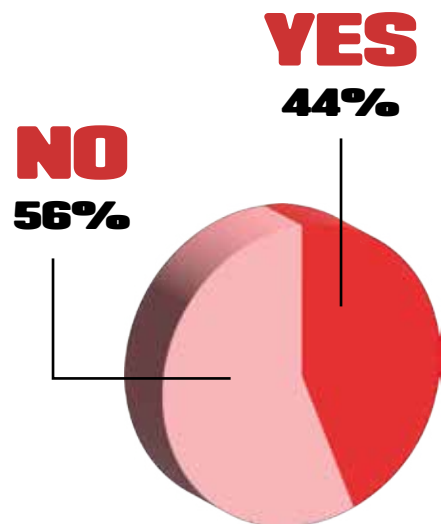
Jim Kentley, senior account manager with Creative Image in Burlington, Kentucky, says the company is actively recruiting seasonal snow removal employees in the summer. During peak landscape season, the company has about 110 employees and does between \$6 to \$10 million in revenue.

"Our labor force has been pretty great," Kentley says. "We contract with a lot of local roofers and contractors and use their employees over the winter when they aren't working. That really helps us out a lot. We do have our in-house staff of about 45 guys over the winter, who we employ year-round.

"We start early — in June if we see people putting roofs on, we'll stop and ask them what they do in the wintertime and if they'd like to work for us," he adds. "We also talk with local churches and their community groups where we can help people out with part-time employment. It's been somewhat successful. We have a couple church groups that we use."

At Rosborough Partners in Libertyville, Illinois, General Manager Joseph Haubert says the \$15 million-company keeps a handful of its 110

Are your key employees being actively recruited by other companies (non-snow) in your market?



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employees on staff all year to handle snow removal.

“We’ve been lucky in that we keep around about 16 team members year-round for our snow services,” he says. “We don’t have to contract out any labor for snow removal.”

Wallett’s woes with a lack of snow is impacting his ability to find subcontractors as well. BHK Lawn Maintenance, which earns about \$2 million in revenue, has 30 employees during peak landscaping season but looks for more in the winter.

“My biggest challenge is the subcontractors because I’ve tapped into a lot of firemen that were helping me for years and years — they’re great guys,” he says. “But they don’t want to pay the rider money for the insurance policy anymore because they don’t make any money, so most of them quit and that’s left me in a spot.”

Regardless of a lack of snow lately, Wallett says he’s obligated to be prepared just in case a major snow event makes an appearance.

“It’s expensive just to stay ready. You still have to prepare like it’s going to come because you have to be ready,” he says. “I’ve been doing this long enough to know how much product I have to keep on hold because when you get back-to-back storms, the ice control products start to get scarce if you don’t already have an inventory. We don’t want to scramble so we keep enough for three or four storms around here.”

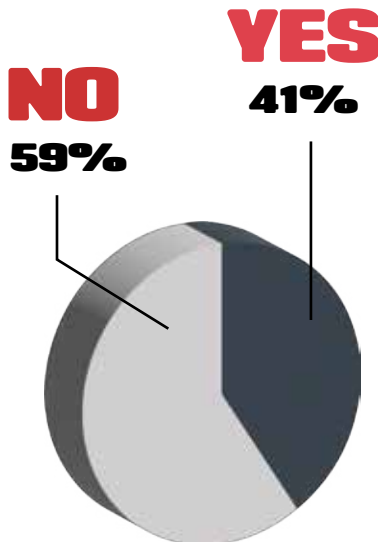
RAISING RATES IS INEVITABLE. Once quality labor is found, making sure they aren’t poached by someone else paying just a little bit more becomes the next problem to plow through.

“The last few seasons have been challenging from a labor perspective because of all the pressures on the labor market over the past couple of years and wage inflation and whatnot,” Hornung Jr. says. “We do see signs that it is easing. We are getting more applications and we’re getting better applications. At this point, we’re getting more reasonable wage requests... there were times when new hires were thinking they could jump wages \$10 or \$15 above where we were paying per hour. Those days seem



Whether there’s been snow so far this season or not, crews have to stay ready just in case the flakes start to fly.

Are your key employees being actively recruited by your competitors?



to be gone now that jobs seem to be a little harder to come by.”

Kentley says they’ve been steadily increasing wages in order to garner more interest and applications.

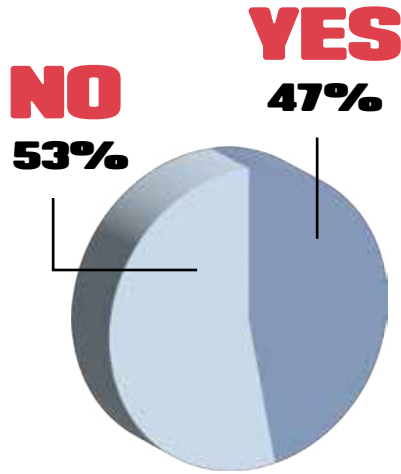
“The pay scale is the biggest thing,” he says. “We’ve changed our pay scale around because most guys don’t want to get out of bed for \$10 or \$15 anymore. We’ve bumped that up quite a bit for our hourly employees.”

Wallett says the competition from other local contractors has caused him to raise rates as well.

“It got very competitive,” he says. “All of the companies were trying to pay just a little bit more... we pay \$25 to \$30 an hour to shovel sidewalks. That’s a lot. But if you don’t, you can’t get anyone.”

BENEFICIAL BONUSES. In addition to paying more from the get-go, companies are also being pushed to offer incentives and bonuses just to get employees to jump on-board when the snow starts coming down.

Do you have an employee recruiting and retention strategy in place for your snow and ice management operations?



“Our biggest challenge is getting the guys to come in when they’re on call,” Haubert says. “We have put in an incentive plan, and we do try and forecast out when these snow events are coming so we can reduce hours leading up to those so the guys are more incentivized to come in and get their hours.”

Since implementing the incentive program, Haubert says he has seen some success and more accountability out of the snow season staff.

“For people who show up for every call-in during the entire season — they are given a bonus depending on how much the call-in is,” he says. “Basically, we pay out an extra two hours for every event they show up for. So, if they show up for every event, and we had four events, they’d get eight extra hours — that’s basically another day’s worth of pay. If they miss one event, they don’t get that incentive.”

And with an over 80% success rate, Haubert says he expects to keep the incentive program running at full throttle this year.

“Of the 16 or so employees that we have who do our snow removal, I think we only had two who did not get the bonus,” he adds.

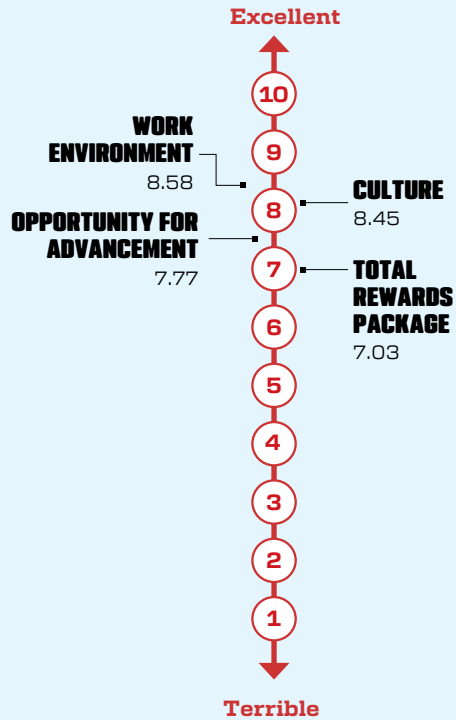
Hornung Jr. says he’d like to try something similar to entice employees to stay vigilant during the hectic snow season — but no finalized plans have been made yet.

“We’re looking into some incentive things for our crews and our team but that hasn’t been 100% fleshed out yet and we’re running up against the clock,” he says. “There’s obviously logistical issues and costs associated with it.”

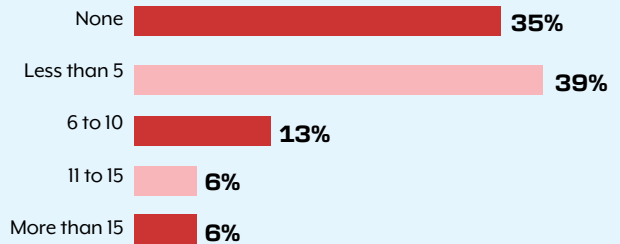
Rather than incentive staff for simply showing up — Kentley says he has incentives employees earn for referring more labor.

“We offer incentives for our local guys,” he says. “They can bring in additional help to us and we’ll incentivize them with a bonus per employee that they bring in for the winter. If they bring in a couple guys, they can make a couple hundred dollars extra.”

Rate the following about your organization
(10 being excellent; 1 terrible)



As you prepare for Winter 2024-25, how many hourly positions do you still need to fill?



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KEEPING IDLE HANDS AT WORK. When the roads don't need plowing — how are crews supposed to stay busy?

"It's difficult to continue to have revenue to cover their wages, and also difficult to keep them engaged and entertained," Hornung Jr. says. "We do the traditional things like equipment maintenance and a lot of property checks. We also do a fair amount of facility upgrades and training and things like that, but it can still get a little monotonous for the guys. That's one of the things we hear on an annual basis."

But Hornung Jr. says snow season can be a bit like a double-edged sword, and he is fielding complaints whether they're too busy or not busy enough.

"The alternative is it snows a lot and they're working day and night for weeks on end," he says. "At first, that can be very entertaining and engaging and financially rewarding, but it does become very dif-

ficult from a family perspective and from a quality-of-life perspective."

Another challenge is in the Buffalo market, landscaping and snow season can sometimes intermix and run right up against one another. That's why Hornung Jr. says crews are already preparing in case the snow starts early.



"We want to continue giving them the same service they're used to while using the **new technology that's out there to help us do that.**"

— Jim Kentley, senior account manager, Creative Image

"Our mechanics are preparing, and have been preparing, for the last couple of months to roll right into our snow season, but we're still landscaping full steam right now and will be through Thanksgiving at the minimum," he says. "But it can turn on a dime, and we can be out plowing snow just after. That can be difficult operationally as well."

Because Haubert is keeping a portion of his peak season staff on-hand during the winter, he says their skills allow them to make up for a lack of snow removal revenue in other avenues.

"We're able to do this by keeping a few small construction projects that can be done during winter on the books along with selling dormant pruning for our maintenance team to continue doing through the winter," he says. "It's been nice because we've been able to keep the people we really want to keep and not worry about them going off and finding other positions."

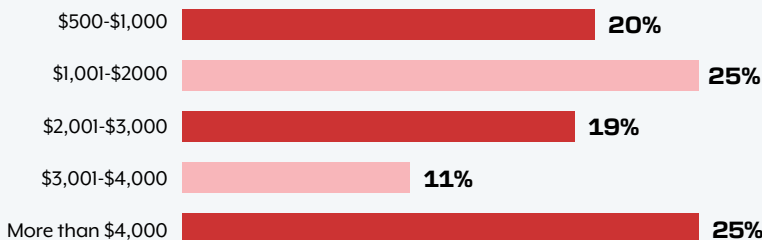
TURNING TO TECH. To best overcome a lack of snow labor, Walleit says he's turned to technology and equipment to make up for having smaller crews.

"I've invested a lot in equipment because we do some pretty large places with not a lot of people, so we rely on equipment," he says. "We've got the whole gambit for sidewalks because that's the toughest challenge."

Walleit adds the labor market was getting so bad he had no choice but to make a sizeable purchase of new technology — though with the lack of recent snow, he's unsure



What does a seasonal contractor cost (e.g., shoveler) you in a typical season?





Contractors are making heavy investments in technology and equipment to do more work with smaller crews.

when he'll see a return on his investment.

"I invested in four snow graders, and they're like \$14,000 each, and we haven't used them," he says. "It was a large investment, and I'll probably never get my money back at this rate, but now we don't have to have a lot of help."

In addition to the new sidewalk equipment, Wallett says this year he's turning to GPS and automation to combat a common plight — customers calling constantly.

"We've always had our trucks with GPS, but this year I have an automatic route notification on there so our customers can see when the trucks are on their property," he says. "That'll stop a lot of phone calls... anything to stop the phone from ringing helps. It's counterproductive when you're running a company and answering the same questions again and again."

Haubert says he too is looking into technology to try and make the snow season go more efficiently, but he hasn't pulled the trigger on anything just yet.

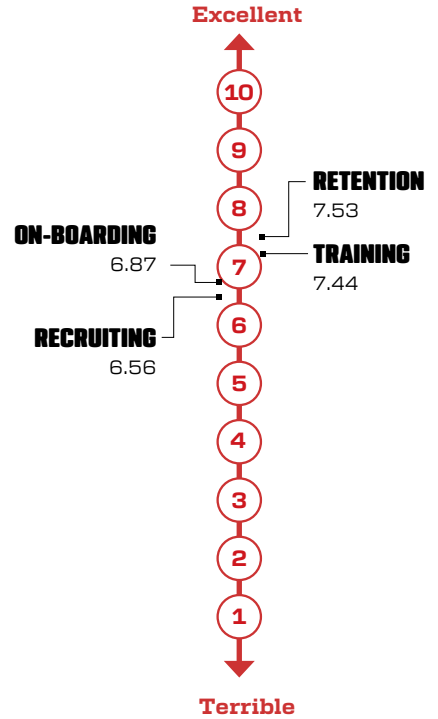
"We're looking into some different technologies and things, but nothing has piqued our interest enough that we will change anything," he says. "We're looking at some of the equipment and things that are out there. We do some large properties and are looking into the different salt alternatives for those."

Kentley says after testing out some new deicing strategies the last few seasons, Creative Image will be making a big change come wintertime.

"We're looking to do more of a liquid deicing this year at some of our medical facilities," he says. "We've been dabbling with it for a few years, but this season we're putting both feet in the water. We've invested in that equipment because our biggest complaint at some of those hospitals is salt being tracked in the buildings. We want to eliminate that and obviously keep the slip and falls down to zero. We want to continue giving them the same service they're used to while using the new technology that's out there to help us do that." **L&L**

Rank how well you do the following

(10 being excellent; 1 terrible)



How confident are you that you will be fully staffed by this winter's first billable snow and ice event?

69%
Confident

25%
Unsure/Neutral

6%
Not confident

How many hourly employees do you have for snow and ice services?

23%
25 or more

13%
20-24

6%
15-19

10%
10-14

26%
5-9

22%
Less than 5



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