

Guidelines for Winter: Ice and Snow Removal in Germany

As with most things, the Germans have very specific rules and regulations (*die Satzung*) concerning who is responsible for keeping roads, walkways, driveways and paths safe in the winter.

Who has to do what?

Virtually every town or city in Germany and the other German-speaking countries has a set of rules and regulations called the “Straßenreinigungssatzung” (“street cleaning statute”) or “Satzung über die Verpflichtung zum Reinigen, Schneeräumen und Streuen auf Gehwegen” (“statute concerning the obligation for the cleaning, removal of snow, and sanding on walkways”) – or something similar. Most communities have these regulations posted on the town’s official Web site (usually www.stadt.de and only in German).

Clearing snow off the roads is the responsibility of the community (*Gemeinde*), but, as in the US, only the main roads may be plowed after a big snow storm. Residential streets may not be cleared at all. When it comes to sidewalks and walkways, the town fathers almost always pass that duty on to homeowners.

In general, homeowners and landlords in German-speaking Europe are required to remove snow and ice from walkways on their property or in front of their property. Since landlords can and usually do pass this responsibility on to their tenants, renters also need to know about any possible winter duties. However, if you live in a large apartment building, the *Hausmeister*, building manager, or someone else usually takes care of the grounds and walkways. (See more about renters below.)

The snow-shoveling requirements are spelled out in great detail, even down to the minimum width of the cleared area (70 to 120 cm) and the time during which you must keep snow cleared away (from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m. on weekdays) – even if it continues to snow! Most of the regulations also specify where you can put the snow you have shoveled. You aren’t allowed to simply pile it in the street, for instance. The details may vary slightly from place to place, but the bottom line is that if you don’t comply with the local snow removal requirements, and someone slips and falls in front of your house or apartment, you could be on the losing end of a law suit.

No excuses

Not even illness or being away on vacation gets Germans or expats off the hook for snow duty. The regulations usually require you to get someone else to take care of your snow and ice responsibilities if you can’t do it yourself, for whatever reason.

Landlord or Renter?

Renters may be subject to the same requirements as homeowners if the rental contract stipulates that the renter is responsible for snow removal. However, that requirement must be very specific, with the conditions clearly spelled out in the contract. Even if the landlord has posted a notice about snow removal, tenants are not legally responsible unless the rental contract or house rules (*Hausordnung*) states the specifics concerning that requirement. Otherwise the landlord is responsible for snow removal. Even if tenants are required to do snow removal, the landlord must make sure that tenants have done so.

Common Requirements for Ice and Snow Removal in Germany

- The homeowner or tenant is responsible for clearing snow from walkways in front of the property.
- If the homeowner or tenant is not at home or otherwise unable to clear snow, he/she must get someone to do it.
- Most localities require that walkways be kept free of snow between the hours of 7 a.m and 8 p.m., meaning that if it continues to snow you may need to shovel more than once that day.
- Renters should check their rental contract (*Mietvertrag*) to see if the landlord requires them to remove snow – otherwise that is the landlord’s obligation.
- Walkways do not have to be entirely free (at least 1 m wide) of snow, but must be made non-slippery and safe to walk on by shoveling and sanding.
- The recommended substances for sanding icy walkways are: sawdust (*Sägespäne*), decomposed granite (*Splitt*), sand (*Sand*) or fine gravel (*Kies*). The maximum grain size is often specified (about 5 mm).
- Most localities ban the use of salt, ash, or other environmentally problematic defrosting chemicals for sanding.
- Overhanging icicles (*Eiszapfen*) or snow must be removed from the edge of a roof if it is above a walkway.
- Any injury caused by your failure to remove snow and ice could leave you liable for damages (*Schadenersatz und Schmerzensgeld*) and/or a fine (*Bußgeld*).
- Make sure your homeowner’s or renter’s insurance policy (*Haus-Haftpflichtversicherung*) covers any possible winter liabilities.
- Some communities impose a fine of €500 or more on anyone who fails to follow the regulations for snow and ice removal.

Snow shovels and litter material can be obtained at DPW, Self-Help Issue Point (SHIP), 354-6854.