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Preparing for First Night, trucks haul snow to vacant city lots



Front-end loaders and trucks removed snow from Boylston Street, part of a planned First Night parade route. (Matt Rocheleau/Globe Correspondent)

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)
Globe Correspondent / December 31, 2010

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Just before 11 p.m., a front-end loader began scooping large snow mounds from the edges and sidewalks of Boylston Street.

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As vehicle and pedestrian traffic flowed past the busy bars, restaurants, and retail outlets, the giant snow shovel dumped remnants from the weekend blizzard into a 10-wheel dump truck as several others waited their turn to be filled and driven off into the chilly night.

Their destination Wednesday night: One of five city-designated "snow farms."

Each public works truck is filled with around 15 cubic yards of snow at a time. The seven working were expected to haul between 10 and 12 truckloads apiece before the morning rush hour, city workers said. The end result: Around 1,100 cubic yards of snow seemingly disappeared overnight.

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“In a major storm like the one last weekend, Public Works moves more than 250 million cubic feet of snow from the city’s roadways, enough to fill more than 50,000 rail cars,” said Matthew Mayrl, chief of staff for the department.

The dumping sites, empty city-owned lots across the Hub, often change from year to year. This year, there are five.

The Public Works Department has been bringing snow cleared along the First Night parade route — along Boylston Street, from the Hynes Convention Center to Boston Common — to a large paved lot near the Black Falcon Cruise Terminal in Marine Industrial Park, off Summer Street in South Boston.

A lot in Roxbury has also been used for snow removal this week. The other three lots designated for snow-stacking this winter have not been used much, if at all. Thus, city officials said they did not immediately know their whereabouts.

After enough snow is dropped off by the trucks in successive mounds, the large piles are bulldozed into one massive snow hill until the frozen heap eventually melts away.

Workers were not sure how big the piles at the lots in Roxbury or South Boston would get, but they said they have built some massive ones in the past. One staff member recalled a large staging area packed with a 200-yard-wide by nearly 70-foot-high glacier-esque pile after heavy snowfall in the mid-1990s. The pile, the largest the staff member could remember seeing, did not melt until July.

The city allowed a reporter to tag along with snow-removal staff to watch the late-night and early-morning work. At the lot in South Boston by around 1 a.m., the snow was spread out in more than a dozen individual mounds, almost like massive ski moguls, where each truckload of snow had slid off the large, 10-wheel containers.

Ironically, the lot had to be plowed after the storm to make room for the onslaught.

City officials said they never have run out of space to put excess snow, which also explains why Boston has not invested in highly efficient, yet expensive snow-melting machines used elsewhere, including by MassPort to clear Logan Airport, and by New York City.

Along with roadside trash and other, more permanent obstacles the heavy machinery must maneuver around, snow removal is often slowed by pedestrians, cars, and parked vehicles that disregard no-parking signs.

But there’s a window of time when the pace of work is most efficient: between 2:30 and 4:30 a.m., after the bars empty and before morning commuters pack the streets again.

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