

What is The Professional Snowfighters Association?
Why has it come into being?

Let's deal with the second question first. At the end of March 2019, the Salt Institute, which was a non-profit trade association representing the salt producing companies of North America that had operated for 104 years, was dissolved by the Board of Direction of the Salt Institute (essentially the CEOs of the five member companies of the Salt Institute). That left a void in the area of winter maintenance practice in North America. The Salt Institute has produced for many years a Salt Storage guide, and a Snowfighters Handbook. They also had an award program, which used to be for Excellence in Salt Storage, but in recent years had transformed into an award for Safe and Sustainable Snowfighting. With the dissolution of the Salt Institute, those things, along with a variety of other activities in the winter maintenance field, ceased.

In an attempt to address this void, we have formed the Professional Snowfighters Association, which is a non-profit trade association (technically a 501 (c)-6 organization as per the IRS tax code). The PSA is a community of practice based on sound science and sustainable practices for all those who are involved in winter maintenance. It is a community where there is a sharing of ideas, experiences, needs, frustrations, solutions, and challenges.

The focus of PSA is to allow anyone in winter maintenance to perform more effectively and efficiently their winter maintenance duties.

How does PSA work? It is supported by membership fees, and the four categories of members (individual, contractor, agency, company) provide annual support to cover the budget of the association.

What specifically do we do to help the creation of that community of practice? We have three primary areas of activity at present.

The first of these areas is making research accessible. We take the plentiful research and well-founded practices of winter maintenance and make them available through a series of "one pagers." These are one-page documents that are designed to present key information that could be used by any member of the winter maintenance community. They are intended to be put "on the break room table" for discussion and provide sufficient information and references that an agency could use them to implement the new practices described in each one. In due course we will create short videos to go with the one-pagers.

We run a number of one day training events, often in cooperation with other organizations. Thus, on August 21st we have a one day seminar in the Chicago area "Using Good Practices in Winter Maintenance," together with the Chicago Metro chapter of APWA. We have another event planned in the Boston area on November 13th, and are planning other events, at some of which we may be offering the APWA Winter Maintenance Supervisors Certificate Training Program (and possibly the operators program too).

Finally, we have our agency self-assessment tool, that allows an agency to evaluate their progress in achieving safe and sustainable snowfighting. While the primary intent of this tool is for an agency to conduct their own self-assessment, if agencies submit their completed forms online (and the tool will be online in the members section of the website) they will be eligible for an award, at a level determined by their current progress in the various categories of the sustainability tool.

Of course, these are not all we do, but they are major foci at present. We also have our web site with resource material and a calendar of events that is open to the public but beyond that, for members of the association, there are training materials. There is also a monthly newsletter, the Cutting Edge. The first two or three issues I will write but my goal would be for members of the association to write them in the future. And every two months we have a short memo on a safety issue. The first one dealt with the pre-trip inspection. We will be adding to these things as time goes on according to the needs and desires of our members.

And that is the point of all this. Ultimately, I would like the members to own the association through their participation. The direction that the Association goes should reflect the needs of the winter maintenance community in North America (or at least, those of that community that are members of the Association!). If we can make that a reality, we will not only have succeeded in creating a great community of practice, but will also have greatly advanced the practice of winter maintenance in North America.

If you would like to see what all this has come to so far, please feel free to drop by our website at:

www.professionalsnowfightersassociation.org

You can join (by credit card, or we can send you an invoice) online, and we look forward to working with you going forward.