

## **Case Study: Snow Emergency in Seattle, WA December 2008**

A major snowstorm just before Christmas brought the city to a standstill due to a chaotic and poorly managed storm response by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). Key areas and major streets were not ploughed. Additionally, SDOT opted not to use salt and failed to plough down to the asphalt, leaving a layer of hard-packed snow and ice that made roads nearly impassable without four-wheel drive or tyre chains. These decisions, intended to protect the environment and infrastructure, backfired, creating hazardous conditions that severely impacted residents and businesses.

The consequences were widespread; essential services, including medical transport, were disrupted, and the economic impact was severe, with holiday shopping grinding to a halt just days before Christmas. Public outcry over the mismanagement led to high-level political fallout. The incumbent mayor was voted out in the next election, and the Transportation Department director resigned.

However, this failure served as a turning point for winter weather preparedness in Seattle. In response, the city increased investments in snow and ice management, refined response protocols, extended winter road-salting and adopted a more data-driven approach to winter storm planning. Continuous monitoring and iterative improvements have since been implemented to enhance storm response effectiveness.

By learning from such failures and implementing robust feedback mechanisms, organizations can enhance their asset management strategies, improve service delivery, and build greater resilience against future challenges. This approach ensures that asset management practices evolve continuously, aligning more closely with stakeholder needs and organizational objectives.

1. (Source - "Local News | Seattle transportation official on snowstorm response: "We blew it" | Seattle Times Newspaper". Archived from the original on 2009-04-28. Retrieved 2009-11-30. Heffter, Emily. "Seattle transportation official on snowstorm response: "We blew it"." Seattle Times. February 20, 2009.