



New York City Comptroller
Scott M. Stringer

NEWS

PRESS RELEASE

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COLD, HARD FACTS: COST OF ICE AND SNOW REMOVAL IN NEW YORK CITY AVERAGES \$1.8 MILLION PER INCH

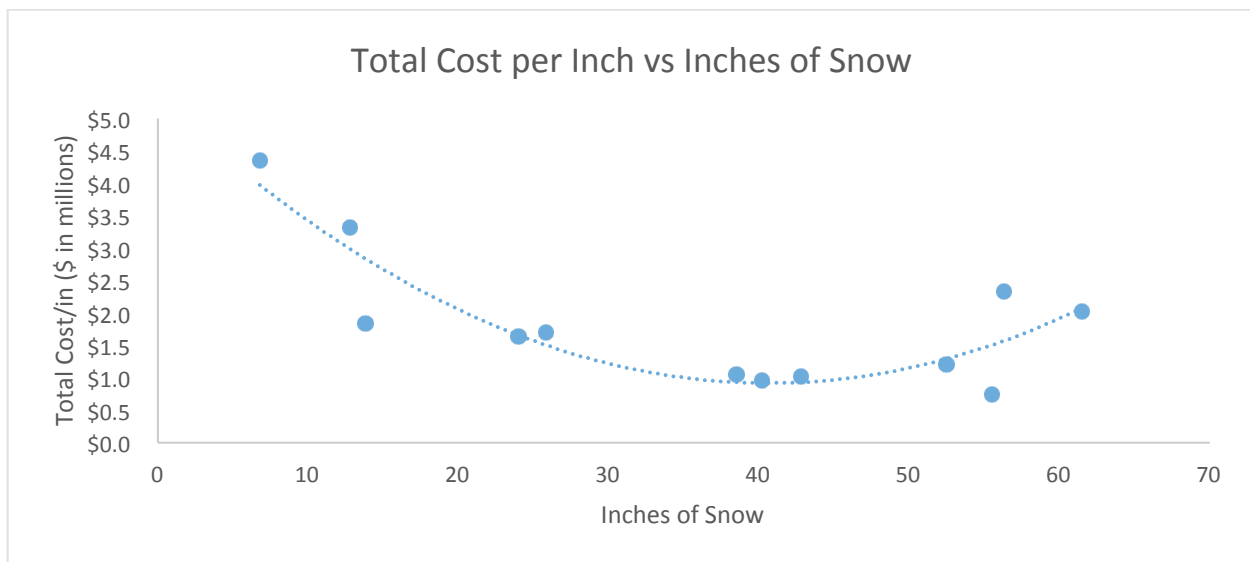
New Comptroller Stringer analysis reveals per inch cost grows with very low or very high seasonal snowfall amounts

(New York, NY) – Light snow and heavy snow seasons are significantly more expensive than average snow seasons on a cost-per-inch basis, according to a new [analysis](#) released today by New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer. Since the winter of 2003, the cost of clearing New York City streets of snow and ice has averaged \$1.8 million per inch, but that amount has varied considerably on a year-to-year basis.

“Snow removal costs the City millions of dollars annually, but it turns out that average winters give us the best bang for the buck on that front,” Comptroller Stringer said. “The total amount that the City pays to plow our streets grows with each storm, but counterintuitively, it’s a lot more expensive per inch when we get a little, or a lot, of snow in a season. Consider the old adage of \$1 million per inch debunked.”

The City budgets annually for snow removal based on the average amount spent over the previous five years. However, the amount the City spends varies according to snowfall amounts during the winter season. Annual costs for ice and snow removal range from a low of \$25.4 million to a high of \$130.7 million and averaged \$55.3 million from FY03-FY14. For the same period, annual snowfall totals averaged 35.9 inches per year, with a high of 61.5 inches in FY11 and a low of 6.8 inches in FY12.

The Comptroller’s Office analyzed ice and snow removal using two major components—personal services, such as employee overtime, and hourly wages for temporary workers, and other than personal services, such as payments to snow-removal contractors, the cost of materials, equipment, fuel, maintenance and training.



- While total costs vary year by year, the per-inch cost of snow and ice removal followed a declining cost curve and averaged \$1.8 million from FY03-FY14. However, the costs per inch of snow removal are significantly higher in light snow years than in heavier ones. The lowest cost-per-inch was \$740,000 in FY03 when the City experienced a snowfall amount of 55 inches. The highest observed cost was \$4.4 million per inch in FY12 when only 6.8 inches fell.
- Higher costs for winters with little snowfall are driven mainly by the fact that, no matter how much snow falls, the city must take certain precautions to be ready for any eventuality. The sweet spot of optimal per inch costs lands at approximately 43 inches. However, if snowfall exceeds the band within 24 and 56 inches per season, history shows that costs begin to rise again on a per inch basis due to the sheer scale of the task at hand.
- Costs for personal services similarly tracked the pattern of lower costs per inch when snow fall fell within the average range: higher costs were seen when snowfall was less than 13 inches or more than 43 inches.
- The two years with the most snow – FY11 and FY14 – were 125% and 136% above the average annual cost, respectively. Both of these fiscal years were characterized by large storms early in the season.

“The men and women who keep our streets clean deserve all the credit in the world for keeping us safe. Winter weather can be unpredictable, but with this analysis we can reasonably predict what the cost of keeping our streets free of snow and ice will be for any given snowfall amount. The more we know about our costs, the better prepared we can be for our budgeting,” Stringer said.

To read the full report, please click [here](#).

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