

How Much Snow is Required to Start Grooming Operations?

The amount of snow depth required to begin grooming operations will vary by area and is affected by the type of terrain and by the type of snow. Remember that it requires a lot more snow to safely and effectively operate a groomer than it does to operate a snowmobile. And it can be a good thing to let snowmobiles run on the snow first before you start grooming operations because it starts the de-aeration and compression process. Generally, at least 8 to 12 inches (20 to 30 centimeters) of wet snow on smooth terrain like a road is enough to begin grooming operations. However, if the snow is drier, or if the terrain is rough or uneven, at least 12 to 18 inches (30 to 45 centimeters) of snow (or more) may be required to safely begin effective grooming operations.

Best Grooming Temperatures

The best temperature for grooming with a drag is generally in the +5 to +25 degrees Fahrenheit (-15 to -4 degrees Celsius) range. Generally, wet snow grooms best at night and dry snow best during the day, *if* the traffic level is low. Oftentimes, early evening has the best temperatures for effective grooming. Generally when using a drag, grooming operations should be suspended when the temperature is below -25 degrees Fahrenheit (-32 degrees Celsius) or above +40 degrees Fahrenheit (+5 degrees Celsius) because it can cause snow to stick in the blades or build up on the packing pan enough of the time to make grooming a smooth trail impossible.

Building Trail Base vs. Maintaining Trail Base

Anytime there is “new” snow to work with, either through new snowfall, blown in snow, or snow that is pulled in from the trail edges, grooming will build (increase) the trail’s base/depth. If “new” snow is not available, grooming will simply maintain the trail base, which is a much less desirable situation. Remember that a drag’s blades must always have snow in them to accomplish either trail building or maintenance.

Watch the Speed

The effective grooming speed when using a drag is typically in the 5 to 7 miles per hour (8 to 11 kilometers per hour) range and is primarily governed by the way the snow is being processed by the drag. Too slow, and a rolling action in front of the blade will not be adequately established. Too fast, and the drag will bounce leaving a poorly groomed trail. It will also spray snow outside of the drag, wasting it. Excess speed can prevent the blades from properly cutting off the mogul and also not give snow the time it needs to fall out into a dip or hole. Slow down and take the time necessary to get a good finished product that will stand up better to traffic. Grooming too fast is a much more detrimental factor than most operators realize and can be a huge waste of grooming resources.

Groom at Night or When Traffic Is Low

Always try to groom when traffic volumes are at their lowest, which is typically at night. This helps allow adequate time for the trail to set up properly and can also enhance grooming and snowmobiling safety. On heavily traveled trails, this could be a window of time as narrow as 2:00 AM to 6:00 AM on weekends. Grooming at night will generally produce the best quality trail since temperatures are typically colder which can help the snow flow better and set up harder. However, the greatest single key to effective grooming is low traffic. So if traffic is heavy, consider an alternate time to groom.

Wind and Shade Can be Beneficial for Grooming

Wind and the location or aspect of the trail to be groomed should also be considered. Wind, by blowing new snow into the trail, and overcast sky or shaded trail locations with cooler temperatures, can sometimes have a beneficial effect on grooming effectiveness.