
Fleet Spotlight: DSNY Snow Melter Operation at Orchard Beach, Bronx

By Keith T. Kerman and Destiny Fierro



The sun has finally arrived and much, but not all, of the snow has melted. Our efforts to recognize the terrific city staff who took on this harsh winter continues. Since the start of 2026, we have had two major snowstorms. The first occurred in late January and the other in late February.

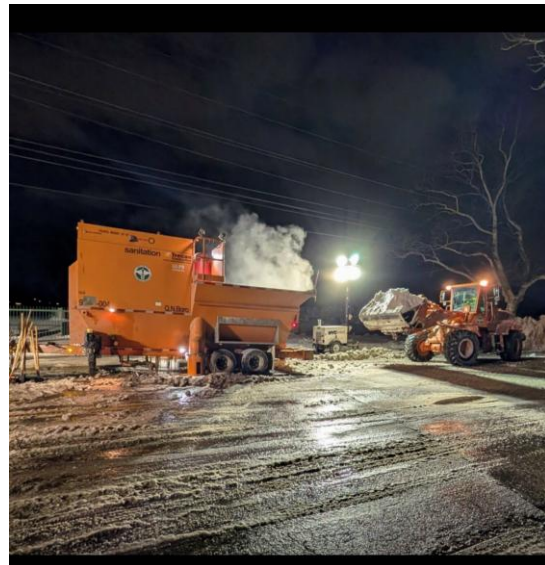
This week, we spotlight the Department of Sanitation (DSNY) team of auto mechanics at Orchard Beach who handle DSNY's snow melting operation. The team consists of Ariel Pena, Moses Blanks, Carlos Medico, and Rafael Velin-Olmedo. They all have the civil service title of Auto Mechanic.

During smaller storms, plows push snow to curbs, medians, and vacant lots and we wait for snow to melt. During major snowstorms that produce larger accumulations, snowbanks can become too high and block streets and sidewalks. That is when the city's 27 snow melting fleet units become critical.

Snow-melting machines are expensive and require significant fuel, equipment, and staffing to operate. They are activated only when certain conditions are met. DSNY will assess the need for snow melting when snowfall accumulates to around six inches or more. Another important factor is when major snowstorms occur close together, as they did this year. The snow had hardly begun to melt before the second snowstorm in February hit. When this happens, there is no longer space to pile snow along city streets. DSNY may also activate melters when snowbanks are blocking parking lanes, bus routes, emergency lanes, intersections, or crosswalks.

The mechanics at Orchard Beach have been operating the snow melter machines since the first snowstorm in January. The parking lot is currently still full of snow. They are not only in charge of operating the units but also cleaning, maintaining, and repairing the snow melters. The snow melting operation can run 24 hours especially when the snowstorm is still active. The team has been working 14-hour shifts. Due to the large amount of accumulated snow, the team is currently operating three snow melter machines at the same time.

There are many challenges the unit faces while on the job. They often spend long hours away from their families to ensure the snow melters remain operational during and after winter storms. The work can also be physically demanding, especially in extreme cold weather. Each day, workers must clean the machines, a task that becomes more difficult when snow and water freeze and build up on the equipment. To do this, they sometimes have to climb ladders to access the inside of the machines and remove ice and packed snow caused by the freezing temperatures.



In addition to maintaining the snow melters, the mechanics also help repair and maintain other vehicles and equipment used to clear the city's streets.

One of the biggest ways New Yorkers can support DSNY during snowstorms is by staying off the roads whenever possible. Fewer cars on the streets allow sanitation workers to plow and salt the roads more quickly and safely, helping the city recover faster after a storm.

One of the city's most unique fleet operations, snow melting also highlights the important emergency contributions made by NYC's skilled and dedicated auto mechanics and technicians. Is there anywhere else in the world where auto mechanics take on such challenging functions?

Thanks to the whole team at Orchard Beach and at DSNY's fleet services for their great work during this tough winter, which we hope is behind us.



This show highlights vendors who support the New York City's Clean Fleet and Vision Zero initiatives, and daily operations. Vendors will offer a wide array of products to improve vehicle safety. The show will also highlight vehicles and equipment with alternative fuels and emissions-reducing technologies, along with the latest in light and heavy-duty vehicles, trucks, horticultural equipment, tools, fleet services, and more!

Thursday,
May 21, 2026
9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

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<https://www.nyc.gov/site/dcas/agencies/nyc-fleet-upcoming-events.page>

37th Annual Equipment & Vehicle Show

Flushing Meadows Corona Park
(by the Unisphere), Queens, NY





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For 10 days, you'll get nutrition info, trivia, and tips for healthy eating.

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