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Winter Weather Makes Getting Around More Difficult For People With Disabilities

By LATOYA DENNIS (/PEOPLE/LATOYA-DENNIS) • FEB 27, 2019

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(//www.wuwm.com/sites/wuwm/files/styles/x_large/public/201902/crowley_awaits_bus.jpg)

William Crowley says icy curb cuts often cause him to go out of his way to avoid getting stuck.

LATOYA DENNIS

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For people with mobility issues, the snow and ice buildup can make getting around outside difficult. WUWM's LaToya Dennis reports.

Cold, snow and ice — Milwaukee has had a lot of all three lately. The winter weather is hard on most people, but when that snow and ice are not removed from public walkways in a timely manner, it can make getting around for people with disabilities even more difficult, sometimes verging on impossible.

“A lot of times when plows plow the streets the snow gets kind of piled up, unfortunately, right at a lot of curb cuts," says 32-year-old Milwaukee resident William Crowley.

“Giant mounds of it that make it impossible to get through. And then if it’s there for a long time, which it usually is, then it can freeze and you get ice as well,” he says.

Crowley is a quadriplegic and uses a motorized wheelchair to get around.

“Sometimes I’ll carpool with a colleague, but when he’s not available, I have to take the bus,” Crowley says.

(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wuwm/files/styles/x_large/public/201902/icy_curb_cut.jpg)

Snow and ice build up at curb cuts can prevent people with disabilities from being able to get around.

CREDIT LATOYA DENNIS

Crowley lives about 10 minutes from the bus stop at Farwell Avenue and Brady Street.

“If you were here last week, you’d have seen a lot worse with snow and ice on the sidewalk,” Crowley says.

It’s been several days since the last major snow so sidewalks should be clear and for the most part, they are — with a few exceptions. The real problems are icy curb cutouts and one at Farwell Avenue and Brady Street that was completely blocked by a snow mound.

“Here’s a good example, there’s a giant mound of snow right in front of that curb cut,” Crowley says.

After giving it a bit more thought, Crowley decided to go for it anyway. At one point, it looked as though his motorized wheelchair might get stuck between the very small opening between the curb and the mound of snow.

(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wuwm/files/styles/x_large/public/201902/blocked_curb_cut.jpg)

William Crowley approaches a blocked curb cut and attempts to maneuver around the snow.

CREDIT LATOYA DENNIS

“If I wasn’t able to squeeze through there, I would have had to go down a block to the curb cut over there and then cross the street,” Crowley says.

He says curb cuts that have not been shoveled out often cause him to go out of his way or depend upon the kindness of strangers to help him through. Sometimes that includes bus drivers.

Matt Sliker, a marketing manager with the Milwaukee County Transit System, says bus drivers are on high alert for snow and ice that might prohibit people from getting on the bus safely.

“If they see that somebody is trying to get over a mound of snow or is taking it extra careful because of ice or something, our drivers frequently stop their bus and get out and lend a helping hand,” Sliker says.

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So, whose job is it to ensure that space where the street meets the sidewalk is cleared? Brian DeNeve, with the Milwaukee Department of Public Works (DPW), says it's the responsibility of the city if plows were deployed because there were at least 4 inches of snow.

"When we do general plowing, which of course pushes elements of snow up to those corners, then we do go back and address those via small vehicles," DeNeve says.

This winter has been particularly hard, he says, because we've gotten a large amount of snow in a short period of time.

He says there are 36,000 corners in the city of Milwaukee and if anyone comes across one that needs to be addressed you should contact DPW.

Back at the bus stop, William Crowley says he now plans to do just that.

"It's not like it's a fresh snowfall, which I can kind of understand that. Like if it just fell there's not time to clear everything. But we haven't had a big snowfall in at least a few days where I think it should be cleared by now," Crowley says.

But in a winter where it's one snowfall after another, you never really know what you might wake up to.

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