



Karen Anderson

## Remember what happened last time it snowed? This year, I've got a sled.

*Club columnist Karen Anderson offers a warning about the coming snow season (and a reminder for those who may have forgotten what it was like last year).*

The Puget Sound region is what weather experts call a “convergence zone.” Supposedly that means that air coming from north of Puget Sound converges with air from the south, resulting in heavy rains and snowfalls. But really it’s called a convergence zone because our irrational optimism about winter weather converges with total amnesia about what happened when it snowed last year, and the year before.

I hate to remind you, but what happened was total chaos.

As our friends and relatives from places like Maine, Wisconsin and Minnesota like to tell us, when it comes to winter storms, Seattleites are wimps. (Our friends and relatives from Alaska don’t tell us anything because they’re too busy rolling in their snow banks laughing at us.)

Two inches of light snow appear, and we’re in panic mode. Nothing like this has ever happened before! The local radio stations preempt the national news to recite the snow emergency routes for Metro buses – those Metro buses that haven’t skidded down Capitol Hill and ended up dangling over the freeway.

Pre-storm, we rush en masse to stores to buy snow tires and chains, only to discover that the stores are sold out. Those few of us who smugly remark that we have chain kits sitting in our garages will discover, eight hours into the storm, that the only car they fit is the one we traded-in last August.

It’s just as well, because most Seattleites have no idea how to drive in the snow. Even those of us who got the hang of it while at college east of the mountains are in for an unpleasant surprise. It’s a whole new hockey game here in Seattle, where the snowy roads are clogged with vehicles whose owners abandoned them and are now at the nearest Starbucks, clutching grande hot chocolates with double whipped cream. No wonder public officials are on the radio begging everyone to simply stay home. But watch out! There’s plenty of trouble to get into there, as well.

We shovel our walkways using pointed gardening shovels, only to discover a few days later that we’ve dug up half of our tulip bulbs. We brush snow from our cars using kitchen brooms. We go out in blizzards wearing wool stocking caps, flannel shirts, down vests, cargo shorts and Birkenstock sandals with thick socks. Boots? Not us. The only boots we own are for fishing.

In the hopes of averting snow-related miseries, the newspaper this fall issued a special section with gentle reminders of what we must do to prepare, and why:

- *Check your supply of bottled water. Your son may have taken it for his solar shower at Burning Man.*
- *Stock up on firewood and inspect the chimney. There’s nothing like a fire to wake up a nest full of hibernating hornets.*
- *Buy a small generator so, in event of a power failure, you can run your refrigerator and freezer for few hours each day. More importantly, it’ll keep your smartphone charged so you’re ready to post pictures of snowmen to Twitter and Facebook.*



I paid close attention to these tips and others this year. Last winter my failure to plan resulted in a painful storm-related back injury.

We had four inches of snow, and our whole neighborhood rushed out to go sledding. The Scholarly Gentleman and I were all ready to go – down jackets, gloves, and, of course, our smartphones – but what we didn’t have was a sled. So I borrowed one from our neighbors, not knowing that the new plastic sleds have

minimal steering and that you sit not on a raised wooden surface, like a traditional sled, but on a flimsy layer of plastic that’s in direct contact with frozen, hard-packed snow.

My rear was completely frozen by the time I’d zig-zagged a third of the way down the hill, which meant I didn’t notice impacts to my spine as I crashed through several clusters of garbage cans, bounced over moguls and came to an abrupt halt in a hedge. What a ride! Needless to say, the next morning I could hardly walk.

I learned my lesson. This year I’m prepared for the snow. Look for me whizzing down the alleys of Ballard on the 1950 Flexible Flyer I bought at a yard sale.