

Kenny Smith: I Deice every plane like my family is on board

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This might put me in the minority, but I love snow. I can't wait for temperatures to drop and the white stuff to start falling. It's not that I'm looking to hit the slopes or build a snowman. Instead, I live for deicing airplanes.

As an American Airlines Fleet Service clerk at Chicago O'Hare for the past 27 years, I've been lucky to go from my warm-weather job of handling baggage to spraying planes every winter so they are free from frost, ice and snow. Deicing an aircraft can take some time — usually around 8 minutes for a Boeing 737 or an Airbus A320-family aircraft — but it's necessary for the safe operation of your flight in winter conditions. In addition to ensuring the aircraft is the proper weight and that air can flow as intended, deicing also enables any moving parts to function like they should.

I've seen deicing technology evolve dramatically over the span of my career. Fortunately, it's making the process more efficient, which gets you on your way more quickly. Our high-end trucks now have displays that show us important data like how much deicing fluid we've used, what parts of the aircraft have been sprayed and how long we've been spraying. That information is sent to pilots in real time so they can keep you informed. We used to be out in the elements wearing rain slickers in "open-bucket" trucks. Now we have closed, climate-controlled buckets that keep us protected; sometimes I deice in short sleeves! Our training is also more advanced. We start preparing for winter in September, teaching new deicers not just in a classroom, but also on a high-tech simulator and outside with parked aircraft.

While the tools and technology have changed, one thing has not. I deice every plane like my family is on board. The safety of our customers and employees is our highest priority; getting you to your destination is our passion.

Every deicing truck is run by two people — a driver and a sprayer. My driver Johnny Kowalsky and I have been teammates for 12 years, and good friends for nearly as long. This month, as you travel to be with loved ones, we won't blame you for dreaming of warmer weather. But you can bet we'll be right here humming "Let It Snow."

On behalf of American and our more than 100,000 colleagues, thanks for flying with us today, and happy holidays!

Kenny Smith
Fleet Service Clerk
Chicago O'Hare (ORD)