

Making the Giant Snow Sculptures

Five enormous snow sculptures are among the main attractions of the Sapporo Snow Festival. The designs change from year to year, and the sculptures are often faithful reproductions of buildings or depictions of characters from popular culture. Some are as tall as a four- or five-story building, and all require a vast amount of snow. Two of these sculptures are constructed by members of Japan's Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF). The remaining three are made by citizens' groups led by retired GSDF members.

Snow is brought in by truck to the sites in Odori Park where the sculptures are to be built. For many sculptures, a framework and scaffolding are constructed and cranes are used to fill the framework with snow. The snow is then packed down into a dense, solid mass. The frame is later removed and the sculpture is carved. Some designs also use handcrafted bricks of snow made by tightly packing snow into individual molds. Lighting is added in the final stages, and many large sculptures serve as a surface for video projections.

In a given year, as many as 10,000 people help transport some 30,000 tons of snow for the festival and shape the sculptures. The weather can have a big impact on the work. Because the dates when the festival is to be held are decided in advance, the schedule for transporting the snow is also fixed. If it rains or if the weather is unseasonably warm and a sculpture needs to be repaired, production teams often work overtime at night.