

Snow

Snow is a useful tool for any film maker. Snow can be achieved in most environments given adequate planning and preparation.

A variety of products and techniques are usually required to create a realistic snow scene.

There are also a number of production issues that need consideration.

This report is designed to give you the basic information needed to have a successful snow shoot.

Used in combination with CG, snow effects are limited only by your imagination.

Please contact DTFX for advice about the combination of snow products and techniques that best suits your job.



BMW. Foreground dressing with CG background

Snow Products

The right product for the job depends on how close to camera it will be, and what it needs to do. There are products suitable for dressing, and others that work well for falling snow.

In general terms, the further away from camera, the less refined the product needs to be. For example, for background areas, snow blanket might suffice. Closer in it will need to be top dressed with paper, salt, polymer or starch.

Some of the products we use include:

Snow blanket – a heavy geotextile used as a base layer for dressing, usually with a top dressing layer of paper or salt closer to camera.

Starch and foam – primarily used as falling snow, but also good for dressing in some circumstances.

Paper – a top dressing layer with good texture and look. Available in biodegradable for outdoor use, and fire retarded for indoor use. Applied with a custom built blower system that wets the paper on application, giving it good adhesion. It can be used to dress trees or vehicles, for ground cover, or areas reasonably close to camera.

Salt – for dressing roads and beaches, but not for use on soil, nature strips or gardens.

Polymer snow – good for close ups, it has a “wet” look and leaves a good imprint when walked on, but can be slippery.



Paper snow being used to dress a tree using the custom snow blower system

Techniques

Snow scenes usually require a combination of techniques to achieve a realistic look.

Dressing

Generally we'll need to lay down a base snow blanket, then dress over the top with the appropriate combination of products to suit your location. This would typically be a heavyweight geotex snow blanket topped with paper or salt.

Indoors we might use paper or salt over the geotex. If a deep snow look is required, say on a roof or for deep tracks, we might need to build a framework to give the illusion of depth, then dress a thin layer on top to save time and money.

Falling snow

Falling snow can be achieved with foam snow blowers, or starch snow and a venturi system. Both have benefits and drawbacks. Foam is easy to use and self-cleaning, but sometimes looks a little lightweight in still air, particularly close to camera. Starch snow, a food grade product which floats very convincingly, doesn't "melt" when in contact with actors, but is expensive and can be sticky when wet and difficult to clean up.

And for deep background, CG is a very effective augmentation to realistic physical effects.



Paper snow dressing – Winter in summer for Canon cameras

Cleanup

Snow is messy and generally requires an extensive cleanup. Careful planning can help reduce that through the use of the right product for your location, but you should plan for cleanup time in your schedule.

Our Service

DTFX can help you plan your snow shoot for maximum efficiency and lowest cost while providing you with a great looking scene. We know the products and techniques, and we've created snow scenes for major clients including BMW, Samsung and Canon, and on films like The Wolverine.

Call us when next you need great looking snow at the right price.



Snow dressing in progress for The Wolverine