

Although today's filmmakers have the financial and technical resources to film in the most challenging weather conditions, there was a time when such an approach was impractical for the equipment, crew and actors. To depict extreme weather, special effects teams often had to push their imaginations to create convincing rain, sleet or snow. This sometimes resulted in outrageous and even dangerous methods - requiring cast and crew to work in refrigerated stage buildings, around asbestos flakes, and even with tons of real snow.

In 1948 the Academy presented Marty Martin, Jack Lannon and Russell Shearman and the RKO Radio Studio Special Effects Department with a Scientific or Technical Award for the development of a new method of simulating falling snow on motion picture sets. They used Phomaide foam, which was originally created for firefighting equipment, shot out of a single syphon injector and blown into the air by large wind machines. The method had been used to good effect on IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE in 1946. One of its most attractive features was its silence underfoot; because the foam made no noise when the actors walked on it, dialogue replacement and other sound fixes were minimized.



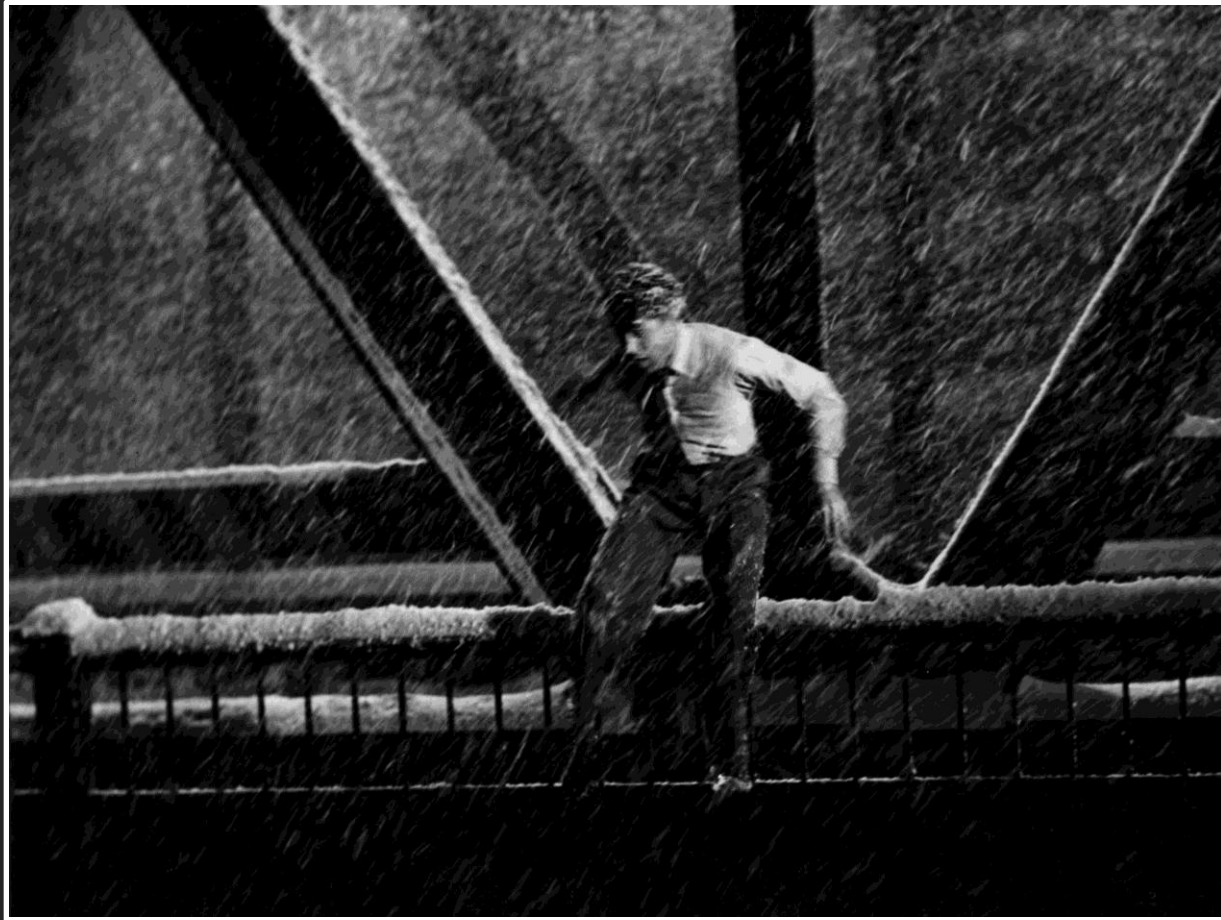
Although table salt often stood in for snowdrifts on window sills and doorsteps, the crew of *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* used 300 tons of gypsum to create the same effect.



One of the sets of *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*, decorated with Phomaide, plaster and shaved ice. Earlier methods of creating snowy scenes included covering the ground with marble dust - which was later washed and reused - or using a spongy substance called Pyrocell.



Ward Bond and James Stewart in a scene from *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*. Bleached cornflakes were once a favorite stand-in for falling snow, but the pop and crackle required extensive sound work in post-production.



James Stewart jumping off a bridge to save Clarence in a scene from *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*. The falling snow is actually Phomaide foam dispersed by a wind machine. Earlier snow effects used asbestos flakes, which were also spread on the tops of trees, bushes and other props.



Henry Travers and James Stewart being thrown out of Nick's bar and landing in a pile of wet Phomaide and shaved ice in a scene from *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*. The film used 3,000 tons of shaved ice for snowy paths and car tracks.



Henry Travers and James Stewart in a scene from *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*. The winter sets used 50 tons of plaster sprayed on trees. Another scenic technique used in many movies was dipping burlap into plaster to create snowbanks.



James Stewart in a scene from *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*. The sound of snow underfoot was often created by someone walking on leather bags filled with sand.