

Hold the Salt!

And other Winter Watershed Protection Tips



Salt, as harmless as it sounds, is a chemical that can harm both our personal & pet health and that of our local creeks and streams.

Road salt (sodium chloride) is most commonly used to remove ice from roads, parking lots and sidewalks. As snow and ice melt, road salt is carried into our lakes, streams and wetlands, where **just one teaspoon can permanently pollute five gallons of water.**

HERE ARE IMPACTS ROAD SALTS CAN HAVE ON OUR ENVIRONMENT:

- At high concentrations, sodium chloride is toxic to fish and insects, and at low levels it reduces the reproduction and survival rates of their young.
- Direct road salt splash can kill plants and grass.
- Sodium in road salt can destroy soil stability, decreasing the ability of the soil to filter water, and increasing soil erosion.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR USING ROAD SALT WISELY AND KEEPING PATHWAYS SAFE:

- **Shovel and follow application directions.** The more snow and ice you remove manually during a snowstorm instead of waiting until the end, the less salt or chemical de-icer you will have to use and the more effective it will be when you do use it. Adding more salt than is recommended won't speed up melting, so follow label directions (1 cup per sq. yd) and spread salt out a few inches apart for best results.
- **Less is more.** Save your back and reduce chemical application by evaluating where you need snow removed. Do you need access to every door or the entire patio? Consider paths versus full snow removal of an area.
- **15°F is too cold for salt to melt snow.** Most salts stop working at or below 15°F. An alternate is to use small amounts of sand for traction instead, but remember that sand does not melt ice and too much sand can become sediment pollution if it washes into streams or storm drains.
- **Sweep up extra.** If salt or sand is visible on dry pavement it is no longer doing any work and will be washed away into your local streams through a storm drain or ditch system.

To learn more ►►

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- **Pet Safety.** Even if the de-icer says it's safe for pets - look at the ingredients! Calcium and magnesium chloride can burn their paws. Use potassium acetate (hard to find, so ask to create demand) or just use sand. And when you take your animals on a walk, cover their feet and/or wash them off after a walk.

For a thorough analysis of **Alternative de-icers**, click on this article:

<http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/translating-uncle-sam/stories/de-icing-dilemma-do-streets-need-salt>

Other Winter Watershed Protection Tips:

Dispose of shoveled snow in vegetated areas; avoid dumping it in streets or streams. Gardens can better absorb snow melt than pavement, so in the next warm up, less polluted storm water runoff will get into our streams.

For nuisance wildlife, use non-toxic alternatives instead of chemical pesticides to reduce indoor and outdoor chemical use. Use boric acid, a low-toxicity mineral or bait boxes to keep winter wildlife out of your home versus chemicals that can have negative health impacts on humans and pets indoors, and water quality if chemicals are used out of doors. (For more information:

<http://www.nrdc.org/health/pesticides/gpests.asp>)

Salt piles should always be stored under a roof. Report uncovered salt piles to that community's Service Department.

Encourage your community to pass a Sensible Salt Ordinance. The City of Richmond Heights uses ~4,400,000 pounds of salt per year to keep roadways safe, and this is one of lowest salt users in Cuyahoga County. The city follows sensible salt guidelines by only salting on main streets, hills, stop signs and corners, so imagine how much salt communities are using without these guidelines? Encourage your community to follow suit! Contact Cuyahoga SWCD for model ordinance language.



Foamy pollution entering creek as snow melts
(photo courtesy of Perkiomen Watershed)



Salt needed to treat one commercial parking lot for one winter weekend....THAT's a lot of SALT!

Have a safe and happy winter knowing that you are keeping the health of the watershed in mind!

Visit our website for more conservation tips on how to Keep Your Yard Green and Our Waters Clean!

To learn more ►►►

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