

Mille Lacs Lake
Watershed Management Group

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TOPIC OF THE MONTH - JANUARY 2016

For the sake of our lakes, keep your pavement on a low-salt diet



As Minnesota begins to deal with snowfall and cold temperatures, most of us will rely on one tool to clear the roads and sidewalks: salt. According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), our waters should follow the advice our doctors have been giving for years: stick to a low-salt diet. Rock salt, which contains chloride, is the most commonly used de-icer. Much like table salt, rock salt's benefits are peppered with danger. Salt saves icy roads but can have the opposite effect on the nearby environment. Drawbacks include polluted waters and poisoned aquatic wildlife.

Chloride from salt eventually finds its way into ground and surface waters. Once in the water, it becomes a permanent pollutant and continues to accumulate over time. In other words it doesn't melt or go away. High levels of salt can be harmful to fish and other freshwater life and can affect groundwater and drinking water supplies, infrastructure, vehicles, plants, soil, pets, and wildlife. "Too much chloride has serious water quality consequences," said Brooke Asleson, chloride project manager at the MPCA. "It only takes one teaspoon of road salt to pollute five gallons of water." A key challenge in reducing salt usage is balancing the need for public safety with the expectation for clear, dry roads, parking lots, and sidewalks.

How can you make a difference? Currently, there are no satisfactory alternatives to salt that are environmentally safe, effective and inexpensive. However, we can reduce salt at the source through application strategies. Citizens set the expectation that winter maintenance crews must meet, and they use salt on personal property such as sidewalks and driveways in the winter. Below are a few simple steps you can take to protect water resources.



Support smart salting. Support local and state winter maintenance crews in their efforts to reduce salt use.

Shovel first. The more snow and ice you remove, the less salt you will have to use and the more effective it can be. After the ice has been broken up, you can decide whether deicer is even necessary to maintain traction.

Apply salt before the storm. Salting before can prevent snow and ice from building up on roads, therefore reducing overall salt use.

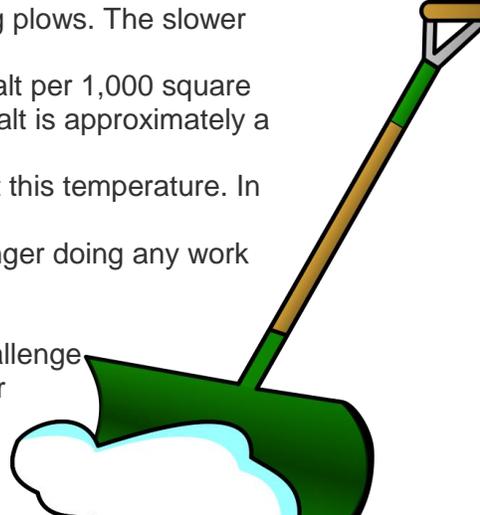
Slow down. Drive for winter conditions, and be courteous to slow-moving plows. The slower they drive, the more salt will stay on the road where it's needed.

More salt does not mean more melting. Use less than four pounds of salt per 1,000 square feet (an average parking space is about 150 square feet). One pound of salt is approximately a heaping 12-ounce coffee mug. And be patient: salt takes time to work.

15 degrees is too cold for most salt to work. Most salts stop working at this temperature. In frigid conditions, use sand for traction.

Sweep up extra salt. If salt or sand is visible on dry pavement, it is no longer doing any work and will be washed away. The excess can be swept up and reused.

Your actions matter. The public has a critical role in helping solve this challenge of providing safe winter travel conditions and protecting our valuable water



resources. For more winter maintenance tips, visit the MPCA website at www.pca.state.mn.us.