

Tips for keeping winter's road salt out of our waters

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When snow and ice melts, the salt goes with it, washing into our lakes, streams, wetlands, and groundwater. It takes only one teaspoon of road salt to permanently pollute five gallons of water. Once in the water, there is no way to remove the chloride, and at high concentrations, chloride can harm fish and plant life. Less is more when it comes to applying road salt.

Kristopher Martin, of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, offers the following tips for keeping salt use down:

- Shovel first. The more snow and ice you remove manually, the less salt you will have to use and the more effective it can be. Then, break up ice with an ice scraper and decide if application of a de-icer or sand is even necessary to maintain traction;
- 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;
- Use sparingly. 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. Applying more will lead to unnecessary contamination;
- Wait for warm weather. Most salts stop doing their job when the temperature is below 15 degrees. Instead, use sand for traction in frigid conditions. 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 for the next snow or disposed of in the trash.

For more water quality tips visit: www.swmpc.org/what_can_i_do.asp