



Backyard Conversation Connecting Community + Conservation

Welcome to the Backyard Conversation! Each month we'll be sharing a conservation topic from a more personal viewpoint for our readers. To make this successful, I want to hear feedback from you! I'll include a poll at the bottom regarding our topic and share links to some of our partner organizations with similar messages. So, let's get to it!

Winter Salt & Storm Drains



Snow, ice, and stormwater can be a difficult balancing act between cost, safety, and environmental impact. On one hand, without salt (sodium chloride), sidewalks and driveways can become dangerously slick when freezing weather hits. On the other hand, salt used on our roads, driveways and sidewalks can have a dangerous effect on our water quality. What to do? What to do?

You might find yourself asking, what can I do to prepare for winter safely?

Effects of Sodium Chloride

Let's dig into the history of road salt. Salt has been used on roadways and sidewalks for snow and ice removal since the 1930's and remains the most cost-effective de-icer. In the US, over 19 million tons of road salt is annually spread over our highways, roads, parking lots and sidewalks to keep us safe. However, without

proper use, it can easily be transported when the water melts straight into our storm drains, which then move directly to rivers and streams without treatment. Depending on the amount of salt entering our storm drains, the high concentrations can harm our freshwater aquatic life. Even runoff that is directed to vegetated areas is not safe for surface waters. The chloride ion remains in ground water as it moves through the soil profile and can contaminate streams months later when the stream receives ground water as base flow. It can take decades for road salt to flush out of a watershed ([Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies](#)).



Not only does it affect water quality, it can corrode paved surfaces, ruin buildings and even cars, dehydrate plants, limit springtime growth, and after the snow melts you might find bare or brown grass patches in your yard.

What can be done?

Knowing that doing nothing is just not possible, we find ourselves asking, what can be done to at least minimize runoff concerns? What are the alternatives for safety, cost, and environmental sustainability? Currently, there are not many environmentally safe, effective and inexpensive alternatives to road salt. Alternative chemicals include magnesium chloride, potassium acetate, calcium chloride, calcium magnesium acetate, potassium chloride, and agricultural by-products (ABP) but alternative de-icing chemicals can also have environmental drawbacks, so it becomes a matter of doing less harm rather than no harm.

The safest method requires more physical force: Removing the majority of the snow through shoveling or with a snow blower. It's easiest to do after the snow stops falling but before it freezes. No salt, or at the very least, very little salt, is needed with proper snow removal.

"Dry" snow does not bond to pavement and can be easily shoveled, but pre-treatment before an ice storm has been shown to reduce the amount of de-icing chemicals needed, as it prevents bonding between ice and pavement, and makes any top layers of snow removal quicker and easier for the homeowner.

With simple precautionary measures and proper use, de-icing and salt can be done safely. Most importantly- follow the recommended guidelines for proper usage and be mindful with when you treat.

Just Remember-

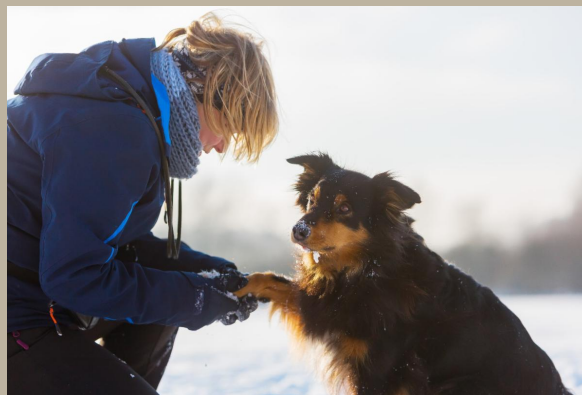
- Salt before the ice - It's always easier to prevent than de-ice. Salt applied before a storm that is likely to produce a layer of ice is easily more effective than salt applied after, on top of the ice.
- Use the minimum amount of deicer or anti-icer. It's only supposed to break the bond to make shoveling easier.
- Check the temperature - If it's really cold outside, and the ice is already set on the ground, your salt may not work, so applying more won't help. Each type of salt has a different temperature range- for sodium chloride (the most common salt), anything below 20°F the salt will be less effective. Most salts stop working completely at 15°F ([Minnesota Pollution Control Agency](#)).



- Less can be more- Use a hand-held spreader to help apply a consistent layer across the surface. A successful rate for rock salt is about a handful per square yard. Excessive use is wasteful, increases costs, and has an environmental cost.

Don't forget about your 4-legged friends!

Repeated exposure to road salt will dry a dog's skin and cause local irritation and cracked paws. Make sure to wash and inspect paws after outdoor walks as even more dangerous than eroding those tender paws, road salt can be inadvertently swallowed by dogs.



- Avoid walking your dog in heavily salted areas.
- If your dog will tolerate something on its feet, consider booties.
- Bring a towel on long walks to clean off stinging, irritated paws.
- After each walk, wash and dry your pet's feet and stomach to remove ice, salt, and chemicals.
- Check for cracks in paw pads or redness between the toes.
- Trim hair between dog's toes to make it easier to protect and clean.
- Use ice-melt products that state they are 100% safe for pets, children, and the environment.
- Read the ingredients label on "pet-friendly" and "pet-safe" ice-melt products to ensure they truly are safe.

POLL TIME

What topics are you most interested in hearing about next year?

Native Plants & Trees

Select

Stormwater Solutions

Select

Composting

Select

Rain Gardens

Select

Green Infrastructure

Select

Stream Buffers

Select

Watersheds

Select

Other- Let us know!

Select

Here were the full results from last month's Prepping for Winter poll!

12.4%

Fertilize the yard in late fall

20.2%

Get the bird feeders ready

23.6%

Get the garden winter ready

21.3%

Keep the grasses tall

18%

Deer Proof their yard!

4.5%

Have other ideas!



Wishing you a safe and healthy holiday season this year!

from our Team to Yours

happy holidays

Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District

Kristin Hilson

Marketing & Public Outreach Coordinator

Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District

1404 Goodale Blvd. Suite 100, Columbus, OH 43212

p: 614-486-9613, ext. 111 | e: khilson@franklinswcd.org

Connect with us online!

Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District | (614) 486-9613 | www.franklinswcd.org



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