

Winter weather tips: Walkway salting and the environment

As winter approaches and outdoor activities are generally reduced, environmental pollution is still a consideration. During the season, a practice that contributes to storm water pollution is applying salt to paved surfaces. There are still methods to reduce this salt pollution from entering our storm water.

Using salt is an excellent way to reduce ice on sidewalks and driveways. Many of the bags of salt found in local grocery or hardware stores are sodium chloride. Compared to other salts, sodium chloride is more detrimental to the environment and can harm pets as well. Another downside is that sodium chloride is only effective down to 20 degrees.

There are other salts in the market that work the same, and are more environmentally friendly. Magnesium chloride in particular is used both on and off base to protect the roadways from ice. Magnesium chloride is effective to a lower temperature and releases less chloride ions to the environment. Other alternative salts include calcium chloride and potassium chloride.

It is also important to apply the correct amount of salt to driveways and sidewalks. Before applying salt, shovel as much snow and ice off the surface as possible. If there is still a slip hazard, apply salt according to the recommendations on the package. Applying too much salt can stain clothes, kill grass and contribute to corrosion on unprotected metal.

Be sure to check the label when stocking up on salt or alternate and apply only after shoveling.