



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

Allison Fore

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer

312.751.6626

allison.fore@mwrdd.org

100 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

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## Go easy on the salt: Spreading lightly protects water quality



*Over-salting sidewalks is a waste of resources and harmful to the environment. Salt can run off and enter the water environment and impact aquatic life. The MWRD urges moderate spreading this winter.*

With winter underway, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is taking the opportunity to share tips for smart, efficient handling of road salt. While road salt enhances safety and helps Chicago thaw out of icy conditions, it also has unwanted ramifications for the local water environment.

Rock salt (sodium chloride) and salt runoff can be harmful to wildlife, insects, bodies of water and soil along roadways and sidewalks. In addition, excessive road salt can impact vegetation and invasive species, contaminate groundwater and drinking water. The challenge with protecting Lake Michigan and the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) is that road salt use increases with urban development, and the more development, the more miles of roads and walkways that need winter deicing. All that salt eventually makes its way to area waterways, and MWRD water reclamation plants cannot always filter it out before releasing it as clean water into the CAWS.

MWRD Commissioner Cam Davis has found success using other salt alternatives. “We found a product with sugar beet extract and another made with alfalfa,” he said. But when it comes to salt, “imagine your sidewalks, driveways, parking lots and roads are like the food on your dinner table. You don’t want to over-salt any of them, and, if you can avoid salting altogether or find alternatives, it’s better for everyone’s health,” said Commissioner Davis. “Salt pollution threatens the rivers, lakes and streams that all of us rely on.”

To meet new chloride limits, the MWRD created the Chicago Area Waterways Chloride Reduction Initiative Work Group in 2015. The group’s goal is to allow stakeholders to develop and implement best management practices to address chloride issues. While the MWRD is not a major salt user, it is the agency’s mission in protecting area waterways that makes it a priority.

The MWRD has partnered with the Lower Des Plaines River Watershed Group to *(continue)*

## Go easy on the salt: Spreading lightly protects water quality, *cont.*

provide the following “Salt Smart/Water Wellness” tips that help save resources while also protecting the waterways from potential contamination.



*Christian Sorensen from the office of Commissioner Cam Davis displays a container of salt substitute made with sugar beet extract.*

- 1. Shovel first.** Salt should only be used after the snow is removed and only in areas needed for safety.
- 2. Size matters.** More salt does not mean more melting. A 12-ounce coffee mug of salt should be enough for a 20-foot driveway or 10 sidewalk squares (250 square feet).
- 3. Spread.** Distribute salt evenly, not in clumps. Clumped salt is wasted salt!
- 4. Sweep.** If salt is leftover on the ground after the ice melts, then too much salt was used. Sweep up leftover salt to keep it out of local rivers and streams.
- 5. Switch.** Untreated salt stops working if the temperature is below 15 degrees. When temperatures drop that low, switch to sand for traction or choose a different deicer formulated for colder temperatures.



*The MWRD takes immense pride in preserving the quality of the Chicago River, and many of those initiatives rely on homeowners, public and private snowplow operators and roadway managers to limit the amount of salt that can run off and enter the environment.*

For more information, visit [mwrld.org](http://mwrld.org) and download “A Healthy Waterway Begins With You: A Guide to Water Wellness” for more tips on how to protect the waterways year-round from contamination. Additional information about the Salt Smart Collaborative can be found at <http://saltsmart.org/>.

A short video clip of shoveling versus salting can be found at this link: <https://youtu.be/SJsXsTCvMyk>.



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### *Recovering Resources, Transforming Water*

*Established in 1889, the MWRD ([www.mwrld.org](http://www.mwrld.org)) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*