

Deicing Around Your Home...Spare the Salt!

How much is too much?

When a wintery storm is forecast, our thoughts turn to potential hazards. Naturally, we start to worry about ice on our sidewalks and driveways. Are we, in our excitement over the storm, applying too much deicer? Exactly how much deicer is effective?

Steps for effective deicing:

1. Clear your driveway and main sidewalks of all snow*
2. Limit deicer application to problem areas
3. Sprinkle deicer crystals so they are about 3 inches apart, or a handful per square yard**
4. After the storm passes, sweep up excess deicer to protect your lawn and waterways

Overapplication of deicers is not more effective at tackling ice buildup, just more expensive. If you have piles of crystals, you used too much! If salt crystals are visible after the surface has dried, you have used too much salt and can use less the next time.

*Think about what pathways are necessary. You can save yourself time, energy, and money by only shoveling and deicing main pathways.

**This is a good general rule, but product application varies. For example, calcium chloride is a handful per every 3 square yards. Best practice is to read manufacturer directions.

What's the harm in overapplication?

All deicers are chemicals and when ice melts it carries these chemicals into our stormwater and into our streams. Applying more deicer than necessary adds extra chemicals to our lawns and our water supply. Yellowing lawns and landscape shrubs next to sidewalks and driveways are common signs of heavy deicer application. Left over deicer products wash down sidewalks and driveways into storm drains and end up in our water supply. Removing these chemicals from our drinking water supply can be costly. In addition, reducing the amount of deicer you use can help lessen damage to your sidewalks caused by many deicer products.

Which deicer should I choose?

There are so many choices when it comes to deicers. No matter which one you choose, all are chemicals that can be carried by stormwater into our streams. Which ones are the least harmful to our natural systems? The US Environmental Protection Agency [safer choice website](#) has taken the guess work out of finding the best options. Simply select deicer in the Product Type dropdown menu for a list of products that are safer for the environment and pets. Remember, apply salt sparingly!

*Common fertilizers including urea, 10-10-10, ammonium nitrate, and ammonium sulfate are NOT environmentally friendly options for deicing. Fertilizers are more expensive, less effective compared to other options, breakdown concrete, and pollute nearby streams.

Alternatives to deicers

Need a little traction? Try cracked corn on your sidewalks. Cracked corn is not a deicer, however it can increase traction in slippery areas. There are several other options including sand, fireplace ashes, and kitty litter that can increase traction as well, but these alternatives require cleanup after the snow melts.

To stop ice from covering steps or smaller areas consider covering these areas with heavy plastic before an ice storm.

Choose salt-tolerant plants

Think about planting [native salt-tolerant plants](#) next to sidewalks, driveways, and roads impacted by deicer application. Adding these plants into your landscaping will help avoid unsightly plant damage.

Suggested Social Media Text

Avoid over-applying deicers. Remember, no matter what type of deicer you use, it is a chemical. Many of these chemicals can damage concrete, landscape plants, and pollute streams. Read manufacturer's directions before applying!

References and Resources:

Minnesota Stormwater Manual: Road salt, smart salting and winter maintenance (link to website:

[https://stormwater.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/Road_salt,_smart_salting_and_winter_maintenance\)](https://stormwater.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/Road_salt,_smart_salting_and_winter_maintenance)

Minnesota CES webpage link: <https://extension.umn.edu/lawns-and-landscapes/effects-deicing-salts-landscapes>

Cornell Cooperative Extension: Road salts in our watersheds:

<http://putnam.cce.cornell.edu/resources/best-practices-for-road-salt-and-deicers>

US EPA safer choice website: <https://www.epa.gov/saferchoice/products>

WV DEP: Before you deice with urea....

https://www.wvca.us/bay/files/bay_resources_homeowners/220_PWP%20Deicing%20article%20by%20Suzy_Lucas_WVDEP_accepted.pdf

Grownative.org: Salt-tolerant native plants <https://grownative.org/salt-tolerant-native-plants/>