

## *Conservation Matters*

A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm [jesshalm78@gmail.com](mailto:jesshalm78@gmail.com)

**Title:** Think Twice Before You Deice

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One of the major conservation concerns during the winter months is the pollution of lakes, streams and ground water supplies from run-off. While run-off pollution is problematic year-round, winter concerns are heightened by the presents of deicer compounds used to control ice buildup. The state is doing their part by minimizing the impact road treatment has on the environment without compromising the safety of our highways; we can help by following their example and taking the time to evaluate our needs and understand the alternatives available to us.

Obviously, to function and remain safe in our homes and businesses, we need to remove ice and snow from our driveways and walks. The most effective method is to keep ahead of a storm and not let the snow accumulate and compress. If possible, plow or shovel your driveways and walks periodically during the storm; try to provide drainage pathways, which will allow water from melting snow to drain away from traffic areas. In most cases, a light sprinkling of sand will provide the traction and safety needed, and will help avoid having ice build-up that requires application of a deicer product.

If, despite all your efforts, you find it necessary to use a deicer product, take the time to read the label carefully. Research done by numerous study groups throughout the country has concluded; most deicers have the potential to damage surfaces such as asphalt, concrete, metal, and wood, as well as vegetation, even when applied in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Heavier than recommended applications will not work any more effectively and may increase the potential for damage. There are numerous products available, including salt free products, each with its pros and cons. Talk to your dealer about the warnings and mixture components of the specific product you select.

The following are highlights of four popular product types used in the northeast that you may wish to consider before selecting a deicer product:

- Calcium Chloride based products – fast acting, work in sub 0o F temperatures.
- Magnesium Chloride based products – fast acting, environmentally friendly, work in sub 0o F temperatures, safer around pets, but lethal if ingested by pets suffering kidney disease.
- Potassium Chloride based products- environmentally friendly, not effective at temperatures below 25o F, safer for pets, but lethal if ingested by pets suffering kidney disease.
- Sodium Chloride (rock salt) based products – inexpensive, not effective at temperatures below 20o F, lethal to pets if ingested.

As we head into the winter months, enjoy the season and all it has to offer; however, please keep the environment in mind. Remember, what you put on your walks and driveways will eventually end up in our streams, lakes, and ground water. Nature does her best to filter out harmful elements as the surface water percolates through the soil, but nature can accomplish only so much and needs our help. Use deicers sparingly; substitute untreated sand, kitty litter, or sawdust whenever possible. Provide drainage paths to channel water from melted ice and snow to areas on your property where the soil can absorb the water and filter it naturally. A little extra effort is all it takes to preserve the environment and our natural resources.