

How to maintain public safety while reducing salt use

Sensible Salting



What is Sensible Salting?

Sensible Salting promotes maintaining winter safety while reducing the environmental harm caused by excessive road salt use. Each winter, more than 270,000 tons of salt are applied across the Chicago region, contributing to rising salt levels in groundwater and drinking water since the 1960s. While public safety remains essential, current salt use exceeds what is necessary.

The Northwest Water Planning Alliance encourages municipalities, contractors, and homeowners to reduce salt use to protect rivers and groundwater. Many road departments are already taking steps by improving salt storage, calibrating equipment, adjusting operational practices, and using anti-icing methods to prevent ice from forming in the first place.

Why cut down on salt use?

- Most of the road salt (sodium chloride) or other chemicals applied to melt ice & snow, ends up contaminating our streams, lakes and groundwater.
- Excessive levels can be harmful to aquatic life and may stunt growth, damage, or kill vegetation when present in soil.
- Chloride accelerates corrosion of steel, concrete, pipes, vehicles, and infrastructure, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage each year.



Best Management Practices

Sensible Salting: minimum salt for maximum safety

- Store salt on a covered, impervious surface away from water and drainage areas.
- calibrate equipment annually to accurately know how much salt you are dispersing.
- Anti-icing techniques, such as applying brine in advance, prevent ice from forming and allow plows to remove snow effectively without repeated salt applications.
- Pre-wetting salt allows less salt to be applied and keeps the salt on the road, while dry salt tends to bounce off.

County and Partner Resources

NWPA member counties and partner organizations have created manuals and handbooks on best salting practices.

Access them here:

<https://www.nwpa.us/sensible-salting.html>

