Help Keep Our Streams Healthy: Adopt a Low (Road) Salt Habit

You have probably heard that too much salt in your diet can be bad for your health, but did you know it can also be harmful for your local waterways?

Sodium chloride, commonly known as "Road Salt", is the most commonly used de-icer on our roadways and driveways. As road salt works, it dissolves into its separate sodium and chloride components, which are easily carried by melting snow and ice into local lakes, streams, and wetlands. ***It takes just one teaspoon of road salt to permanently pollute five gallons of water.*** Below are some of the affects that road salt can have on our environment:

- At high concentrations chloride is toxic to fish and insects.
- At lower levels chloride can negatively affect the fish and insect populations by reducing reproduction and survival rates of young.
- Direct road salt splash can kill plants and grass.
- Sodium in road salt can destroy soil stability, decreasing the ability of the soil to filter water, and can increase soil erosion.

Tips for using road salt wisely

Since it is too costly to remove sodium and chloride once it has dissolved in the melted snow and ice, the best we can do is minimize its use, while maintaining safe roadways and driveways. There are many ways to reduce salt usage while maintaining safe conditions for your family this winter. Follow these easy (and cost saving) tips:

- **Shovel (and use the right tool for the job).** The more snow and ice you remove manually, the less salt you will have to use and the more effective it can be. Whether you use a shovel, snow blower, snow plow, or ice scraper, **get out there as early as you can and keep up with the storm.** You may even decide that salt isn't needed.
- **15°F is too cold for salt.** Most salts stop working at this temperature. Use sand instead for traction, but remember that sand does not melt ice.
- **Application.** For best results, apply salt to cleared surfaces only, and consider purchasing a hand-held spreader to help you apply a consistent amount.
- **More salt does not mean more melting. Use less than 4 pounds of salt per 1,000 square feet**. One pound of salt is approximately a heaping 12-ounce coffee mug.
- **Sweep up extra.** If salt or sand is visible on dry pavement it is no longer doing any work and will be washed away. Use this salt or sand somewhere else, or store it for future use.

Thank you for protecting Tinker's Creek! To find out more information about the Tinker's Creek watershed visit www.tinkerscreekwatershed.org.

For more tips on correct usage of road salts, watch this informative video: Improved Winter Maintenance: Good Choices for Clean Water

Information derived from: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency