

## Pass (On) the Salt

By Abi Parker

SRWD Education and Outreach Coordinator

The crunching of snow under boots is a familiar sound for Minnesotans. Unfortunately, so is the crunching of road salt under boots. In the U.S., snow removal crews spread over 20 million metric tons (about 1 million dump truck loads) of salt each year. Road and sidewalk safety is a must, but our water quality is paying the price. Chloride is a pollutant that's almost impossible to remove from a waterbody and can only be done by expensive methods such as reverse osmosis. It is much cheaper to prevent the salt from entering the waterway in the first place.

Most salt enters surface waters as runoff because it was over-applied and did not stay in place. Once in a waterbody, salt will wreak havoc. It is toxic to many organisms, including amphibians (especially frogs), fish, zooplankton, and aquatic plants. Chloride pollution can also lead to algal blooms and lowered dissolved oxygen levels. Salt can even have negative impacts on terrestrial plants and the soil they grow in, especially lawns, evergreen trees, and crops adjacent to roads.

Aside from the environmental consequences, road salt wreaks havoc on finances. It is estimated that road salt causes **\$5 billion worth of damage** to metal and concrete infrastructure in the U.S. *each year*. Over-salting is ubiquitous, so people are spending money on salt that never serves its purpose of melting ice. **It's time to find more proactive and efficient solutions.** The benefits of reducing or eliminating road salt is a long list. Some of these benefits include saving money, reducing impacts on road infrastructure, preventing water pollution, protecting plants, and reducing rusting on cars.

The SRWD office is striving toward a no-salt approach. There is no silver bullet when it comes to ice removal, so using a variety of methods is key. A simple proactive method is promptly removing snow so that ice doesn't have the chance to form. As far as road salt alternatives, there are options such as sand, traction/chicken grit, and magnesium chloride. Some non-conventional methods are alfalfa meal, wood ashes, birdseed, cat litter, and even coffee grounds! Our office now uses a combination of chicken grit to provide traction and magnesium chloride when melting action is needed. If we each do our part, we can keep the freshwater of our lakes and streams unsalted, the way they're supposed to be!

### Fast Facts:

- There are 50 lakes and streams in MN impaired for salt concentration according to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).
- It only takes **one teaspoon** of salt to permanently pollute 5 gallons of water!
- A standard-sized coffee mug (12 oz.) full of salt is enough to cover and melt the ice on a 20-foot driveway.

