

CONTACT:

Jamie Cahillane

Center for Ecological Technology

413-445-4556 ext. 14

jamiec@cetonline.org

Putting the skids on salt

Every winter, we apply salt to sidewalks and roads to reduce ice and snow build up. The most commonly used deicing salt is sodium chloride (NaCl), which is readily available and inexpensive and effectively depresses the freezing point of water to melt ice. But salt builds up in the soil and reduces the ability of plants to absorb water and nutrients. It also contaminates drinking watershed ecosystems.

Unfortunately, there is no environmentally perfect solution that will keep roads and sidewalks completely clear of ice, says Laura Dubester, director of the Center for Ecological Technology (CET).

A good first step to making deicing more environmentally sound is simply to reduce the use of products that contain high levels of chlorides and urea, which pose health risks to people and the environment. Use deicers with potassium, calcium and magnesium chlorides, rather than sodium chloride. These products contain fewer chlorides than traditional road salt. However, they still may contain metals, so use only what you need.

Some other options include:

- Ash, kitty litter or sand, which increase traction
- Shoveling soon after it snows to prevent ice build-up and reduce the need for salt
- Applying de-icers according to manufacturer's instructions
- Applying products sparingly

For more information on this and other toxic reduction strategies, visit cetonline.org or contact Jamie Cahillane at CET by email at: jamiec@cetonline.org or by calling 413-445-4556 ext 14. CET is a non-profit organization working in the fields of energy efficiency, renewable energy, waste management and environmental education. CET provides practical solutions that make sense for our community, economy and environment. CET is funded in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is an equal opportunity service provider.