

## **OEAC-24-33**

### **Road Salt Working Group Report for O.E.A.C. Meeting May 7, 2024**

**Prepared by members:** AJ Groen (Chair), Emily Posteraro, Joseph Young, Tim Speirs

**Report:**

Pending final approval from City Council, A.J. will be delivering a brief presentation (see attached) on the impacts of road salt to the Durham Environmental and Climate Advisory Committee (DECAC).

**Budget implications:** None

**Recommendations:** That the Committee recommend to City Council that they approve the attached presentation on the impacts of road salt and grant permission to A.J. Groen to present it as such to DECAC.

An aerial photograph of a road surface showing significant damage and salt residue. The road is cracked and has several potholes. A large, irregular white patch of salt residue is visible in the center of the road. The surrounding area is dark and appears to be asphalt or gravel.

# ROAD SALT POLLUTION

A.J. Groen, Oshawa Environmental Advisory Committee

# The Oshawa Environmental Advisory Committee & Road Salt Working Group

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- O.E.A.C. provides comments and recommendations to Oshawa City Council on environmental matters, projects and initiatives that may impact the environment
- Form smaller working groups to further research specific issues
- Road Salt Working Group's mandate is to educate:
  - Raise public awareness on the over-use of road salt and the risks it imposes on our infrastructure, environment and water resources
  - Directed O.E.A.C. to receive presentations from an Ontario Tech University researcher on road salt impacts and from a City staff member on Oshawa's salt application protocols
  - Created an informational postcard on how to reduce household usage of road salt, to be distributed at public tabling events

# Road Salt Impacts

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- Access to fresh water is a subject around the world, with wars being fought over water. These factors impact our freshwater ecosystems and resources.
- Indigenous people call water the blood of our earth mother. Being more aware of how we treat our water resources would be a good way of putting into practice the spirit of land acknowledgments.



# Road Salt Impacts

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- Environment Canada lists road salt as a toxic substance and states “that the Government of Canada is not banning the use of road salt nor proposing any measures that would compromise nor reduce road safety”.
- Chlorides accumulate in our water systems, as they are not filtered by soils, plants or water treatment plants.
- Freshwater plants, fish and invertebrates are particularly affected by road salt application because they are not adapted to saltwater environments. Chlorides from road salts can also enter groundwater sources.



# Road Salt Legislation

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- Many of the salt practices that currently exist are as a result of fear of litigation. The cost of winter maintenance-related insurance has become so expensive that some municipalities are now self insured and may therefore look to minimize litigation wherever possible.
- There are no regulations that limit road salt use, although municipalities may voluntarily follow best practices to reduce their usage.
- There are organizations like the Smart About Salt Council that offer training and certification to apply road salt wisely, but this is all voluntary.



# Road Salt Legislation

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- There are four primary groups that apply road salt. The first two, the Region and the City make informed decisions and are conscious of the impact road salt has on both the environment and infrastructure.
- The other two, private contractors and the public, are totally unregulated. All of the salt that one sees at retail outlets or on household driveways goes into the environment. Improperly stored salt, especially as the winter season draws to a close, also poses a concern.



# Taking Action

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- Within the City of Oshawa we have been successful in starting conversations about the negative side of the overuse of road salt. We are not against the use of road salt but feel that how, where and when to use road salt needs to be reviewed with both safety and environmental impact in mind.
- OEAC has published a card showing how citizens can reduce their use of road salt. More are planned. We challenge the notion that road salt is the cheapest way to keep our roads clear by pointing out that the cost of infrastructural and environmental damage is not included in the calculation. The costs of maintenance related to infrastructure damage (e.g., replacement of metal doors and frames, etc.) are often hidden in budgets, and true or whole costs are not evaluated.





**OEAC**  
Oshawa Environmental Advisory Committee

## **Are you using too much winter road salt?**

**Flip this card over to discover how  
you can help**

- **infrastructure**
- **drinking water**
- **freshwater habitats**



# Road salt: less is more

By limiting road salt use, you can safeguard the ecosystem, especially freshwater lakes and streams by:

- Spreading a small amount of salt evenly on driveways and walkways when snow or temperatures below freezing are expected to prevent ice formation.
- Using a 12-ounce coffee mug of salt. It is enough to treat a 500-square-foot driveway or around 10 squares of sidewalk.
- Clearing the sidewalk around your property to help prevent ice buildup and limit the need for salt.
- Directing downspouts away from walkways and driveways.
- Considering alternatives like sand, grit, non-clumping kitty litter, or magnesium chloride when temperatures go below  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ .
- Sweeping any loose salt and store it safely for reuse.



If this information is required in an accessible format, please contact Service Oshawa by calling 905-436-3311 or email [service@oshawa.ca](mailto:service@oshawa.ca)

# Taking Action

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- Our goal is to develop programs that educate the public about the risks and the damage caused by the overuse of road salt. The hope is that with a greater public understanding of the destructive power of road salt, we would see best storage and application practices that would result in a reduction in salt pollution and municipalities would receive fewer calls complaining about snow clearing.

# Taking Action

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- We are not against the use of road salt, but we encourage municipalities to review how and when salt is applied and stored.
  - Does a cul-de-sac need to be salted before a snowstorm? How many times have streets been salted and brine been applied and then no snowfall happens? When the weather forecast suggests snowfall, might we consider pre-salting major roads only prior to the expected snowfall?



# Taking Action

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- We would like to see discussions on regulating private contractors, very specifically how they store road salt.
- We hope to urge the public to be quicker to use shovels and sand on private property.



# Taking Action

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- We would like the conversations to go well beyond the City of Oshawa and Region of Durham. A coalition of groups province wide, all encouraging conversations and educating about the dangers of road salt and seeking better ways of using it and other materials and techniques.
- We ask that DECAC consider starting a road salt working group that mirrors the mandate of OEAC's salt working group, that educates people about the long-term risks to infrastructure and our environment and ensures that Durham Region is following best practices when it comes to road salt application and storage.

