



## **Protect Our Lakes: Put your property (and driving habits) on a low salt diet!**

by Andrea LaMoreaux, NH LAKES



While many of us are looking forward to the recreational opportunities and beauty that winter has to offer, I doubt that many of us are looking forward to the season of removing snow and ice from our roadways, driveways, and walkways. Although safety is our primary concern with snow and ice removal, salt (sodium chloride) and other de-icing products have a negative effect on the health of New Hampshire's approximately 1,000 lakes and ponds and 18,000 miles of river and streams.

**Chloride levels in New Hampshire's freshwaters are 100 times more today than they were 50 years ago before salt was used to melt ice on roadways.** In many small streams in southern and coastal New Hampshire, elevated chloride levels are so high that they threaten the health of sensitive fish species and smaller organisms that serve as their food source. In addition, elevated chloride levels in drinking water supplies pose a health risk to people in need of restricting their sodium intake.

**Our water resources are being inundated with chloride from many sources.** Water runoff from local roadways, parking areas, driveways, walkways, and salt storage areas, and discharges from water softening systems from regional water suppliers and individual homeowners all contribute to the problem. This creates quite a challenge for reducing salt use and protecting water quality in New Hampshire. Unlike other pollutants, salt cannot be treated or removed from runoff—what salt is spread on the ground and pavement moves through the natural system and eventually reaches our groundwater and surface water.

**Our only option to restore water quality is to reduce our salt use.** The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services and Department of Transportation are working with the United States Environmental Protection Agency to study chloride levels in certain regions of the state and identify needed reductions to improve water quality. While these organizations will be taking appropriate actions themselves and working

with area communities to reduce salt use, NH LAKES encourages property owners to take action to reduce their contributions to salt pollution. You can do this by simply putting your property on a low salt diet this winter. Here's how:

**Minimize your use of salt for deicing:** Use salt only when absolutely necessary, and use only enough for safe passage. Learn to gauge how much is enough. The warmer it is, the less salt it takes to melt the ice.

**Store salt under a roof or in a sealed container so it is not exposed to rain or snow.** If this is not possible, outside piles should be placed on concrete pads and completely covered with a tarp. Keep salt piles away from storm grates as these may drain directly to lakes and rivers.

**Sweep up leftover salt, sand, and other abrasives used after every storm.** If you can see salt crystals or other particles on the walkway or driveway after the ice is gone, sweep the area and store the materials to be reused during the next storm. These particles pollute by washing downstream and ending up in lakes, smothering aquatic plant and fish habitat

**Move snow piles away from walkways and driveways.** This will help to prevent ice formation on these surfaces caused by melting and refreezing during late winter months.

**Avoid using alternative deicing chemicals near waterways or drainage to waterways.** Some of these new products deemed "safe" may contain ingredients similar to fertilizers. Once in the water, these products can cause additional damage by depleting the oxygen that sustains fish and other aquatic organisms.

- **Help encourage salt-free behavior!** The biggest barriers to reducing salt use on New Hampshire roads and parking lots are concerns about safety and liability. If you hire a contractor to remove snow, be sure they are a certified Green SnowPro—these professionals are leaders in the snow removal industry, trained in the most up-to-date technologies and snow management practices to ensure a high level of service and safety to their customers. (For more information, visit <https://www.des.nh.gov/land/roads/road-salt-reduction>). You can also take responsibility for your own safety by watching where you walk, wearing footwear with traction, driving slower in storms, using snow tires, or even staying home during storms.

**By putting our property, and our driving habits, on a low-salt diet, our lakes will be healthier!**

NH LAKES is the only statewide, member-supported nonprofit organization working to keep New Hampshire's lakes clean and healthy, now and in the future. The organization works with partners, promotes clean water policies and responsible use, and inspires the public to care for our lakes. For information, visit [www.nhlakes.org](http://www.nhlakes.org), email [info@nhlakes.org](mailto:info@nhlakes.org), or call 603.226.0299. We hope that you will share this article with others—we just ask that you include the following: *This article was originally published by NH LAKES. Thank you!*