

WINTER MAINTENANCE



Municipalities across Ontario have taken sensible salting to heart but that's only half the battle. According to some estimates in urban areas the private sector is responsible for almost half the salt used for de-icing.

"Smart About Salt" rewards contractors and private owners that use winter salt best practices on their parking lots, sidewalks and private roads.

"It's a case of 'less is more'," says Bob Hodgins, the executive director of the Smart About Salt Council. "With best salt management practices: less salt, more savings and more environmental protection."

winter maintenance continued on next page

WINTER MAINTENANCE

Less is More *continued from page 27*

It is early December and with the first storm of the season, municipal road crews are out early, clearing the snow and ice. It is a sophisticated operation, aided by an array of chemical anti-icing and de-icing agents and carefully calibrated spreaders measuring out the precise amount of rock salt needed to melt the ice. But they're not the only ones out before the sun is up. On parking lots, sidewalks, and driveways across the city, a small army of private contractors are out in force and, except for a handful who have become smart about salt, there is nothing precise about their de-icing efforts. If one kilogram of salt does a good job, two kilograms should be twice as good and so they spread the salt with abandon.

"Nothing beats salt for de-icing but its biggest attribute is also its biggest drawback," says Bob Hodgins, the executive director of the Smart About Salt Council. "Because salt is so inexpensive, private contractors have no incentive to use the



InSight

The Smart About Salt Council

Founded: 2010

Objective: encourage salt management practices for sidewalks, paths, parking lots and other off-road surfaces.

Target Members:

- private contractors
- facility owners and managers

Partners

- Region of Waterloo
- Landscape Ontario
- Building Owners and Management Association (Ottawa Chapter)
- Ontario Good Roads Association

Coponents

- operational self-assessment
- site self-assessment
- operator training and accreditation

Benefits

Registered contractors and facility managers get:

- use of the Smart about Salt logo to promote their business;
- lower winter maintenance costs;
- less damage to grass, plants and bushes and less landscaping maintenance costs;
- risk management;
- lower insurance costs.

product judiciously. In fact, they have every incentive to over salt, to make sure the job is done and to avoid any potential liabilities from slip and falls.

"But nobody is taking into account the collateral damage to buildings, pavements and vegetation nor the harm the runoff does to our water quality. It is not that private contractors are wilfully doing a bad job. They haven't had the training to understand that they can do a better job and improve their operations and profitability by using best salt management practices."

It was just such concerns that led the Region of Waterloo to start the Smart About Salt program in 2007. It is the first comprehensive salt management program in Canada aimed at private contractors and facility operators. Although voluntary, the program recognized contractors and site owners that met salt management best practices standards. In return, the contractors were allowed to use the "Smart about Salt" logo in their advertising to raise their profile in the community and promote their business. They were also eligible to bid on contracts that specifically called for "Smart About Salt" qualified contractors.

In 2010, the Smart About Salt Council, a not-for-profit orga-

WINTER MAINTENANCE

nization, was formed to take the program province wide. The founding partners included the Region of Waterloo, Landscape Ontario, many of whose members provide private snow removal services, and the Building Owners and Management Association Ottawa, representing the building owners and developers paying for the services.

As Tony DiGiovanni, executive director of Landscape Ontario noted, "The Smart About Salt program is a gift to the snow and ice management industry. It will increase knowledge and professionalism, reduce the environmental impact of salt operations while still maintaining safety."

Smart About Salt

Smart About Salt takes a two-pronged approach that promotes the partnership between site owners and their contractors: a certification program for contractors to promote best practices

in salt management, and a certification program for building and site owners promoting environmental responsibility and practising risk management.

To become certified, contractors carry out a self-assessment based on best practices for good salt management. The assessment covers, amongst other items, basic salt management practices such as equipment calibration, application rates, record keeping, salt storage and training. Contractors must demonstrate that they have a plan to meet the highest standards of the best practices in each category within two years.

To help contractors meet the best practices standards, the Smart About Salt Council provides operator training. The one-day course, held around the province prior to the start of

winter maintenance continued on next page

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Less is More *continued from page 29*

the winter season, includes modules on salt science, liquid de-icers, the environmental impact of salt, weather, risk management, equipment operation and record keeping. The training promotes the 4Rs of salt management: the right material in the right amount in the right place at the right time.

Building and site owners go through a similar self-assessment for their certification. The facilities (which can include shopping centres, manufacturing sites, residential developments, hospitals, universities, colleges and schools) are evaluated based on their site characteristics and salt use. Parking lots, sidewalks and private roads are assessed for drainage, potential areas of ice formation (which may lead to slip and falls) and designated snow storage areas that may cause environmental problems. Building owners are expected

to correct major deficiencies and are also required to use Smart About Salt certified contractors. Building and site managers can also be accredited upon completion of the necessary training.

More Than Good Intentions

Smart About Salt appeals to those who understand environmental responsibility but it is about more than good intentions. There are practical benefits as well, not the least of which are the cost savings that owners and contractors can realize.

“It is a case of less is more,” claims Hodgins, who helped develop the first Smart About Salt program in the Region of Waterloo. “When you use less salt, you spend less. Vehicles, clothing and shoes look better and last longer. Building, sidewalks and roadways suffer less damage. For the community it means stronger infrastructure, reduced costs and better water quality.”

But it is in the area of liability where contractors and owners can see the biggest savings, he says. “There is a bit of a myth that the more salt you use, the safer you are. We would never promote a reduction in safety. In fact proper application improves safety.

“The Region of Niagara’s Water and Wastewater facility managers wanted to reduce the risk of slip and falls at their sites so they asked the Region’s Transportation Division to help frame a contract. It was a very gutsy contract, defining levels of service, specifying application rates and when and where to use anti-icing and de-icing liquids. Since the inception of this contract, there has been a noticeable reduction in the amount of reported slips and falls.”

By identifying high risk areas, developing strategies to reduce the potential for slip and falls, and keeping good records, building owners and contractors can reduce liability claims, Hodgins says, which insurance companies are now acknowledging. Marsh Canada, a member of Marsh & McLennan Companies, a risk and insurance services firm, offers a liability premium discount for Canadian



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WINTER MAINTENANCE

Nursery Landscape Association members under their HortProtect program for any contractor that is Smart About Salt certified.

Municipalities are key to the success of the Smart About Salt program, concludes Hodgins, who is currently working with several municipalities to develop their Smart About Salt programs. They have set an example in developing their own stringent salt management plans for roads but have not addressed private snow clearing contracts, including the contracts that they have outsourced for their own off-road facilities.

“Municipalities have a lot to gain in reduced damage to local infrastructure and better water quality,” he says. “We hope to see municipalities make Smart About Salt certification a

condition for any of their private snow removal contracts and, if they want to protect their water quality, they should be urging local property owners to do the same.”

Woodstock Ontario is the latest municipality to adopt the Smart About Salt program.

“We see the Smart About Salt program as the perfect vehicle for meeting our environmental and safety objectives by improving salt management at our facilities,” says Alex Piggott, the city’s works superintendent. “We will be requiring our snow and ice control contractors to be Smart About Salt Certified and that their operators are SAS accredited.” **M**

winter maintenance continued on next page

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