



Winter Watershed Wisdom

By: Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Inc.

Winter brings unique challenges to watershed health. The biting cold freezes the ground, making it difficult for water to soak through the soil. Snow and ice trap pollutants until the spring thaw releases all these contaminants into the Chagrin River Watershed and Lake Erie. Being conscious of the actions you take all winter long can help reduce pollution in our water and help keep our watershed healthy.



Hold the Salt

Sliding around on icy sidewalks and roads can be dangerous, but road salt has its drawbacks too. Road salts contain chloride, which is damaging to concrete, vehicles, and plants in your landscaping. The runoff from road salt can make its way into streams where it's toxic to critical aquatic species. This excess chloride can even find its way into our drinking water. Reducing the amount of salt you use in the winter can go a long way toward improving watershed health. According to The Salt Smart Collaborative, 12 oz of evenly spread salt is all you need for an area equal to 10 sidewalk squares. Mixing salt with a natural substance like beet juice is an effective way to spread smaller amounts of road salt further. When temperatures drop below 15°F, salt becomes ineffective, so try a salt alternative instead. Potassium acetate (KA), calcium magnesium acetate (CMA), and sand are all less damaging and can be used in place of road salt on sidewalks and driveways. Always shovel snow first before you apply salt.



Shovel Smart

Removing snow from walkways and driveways helps prevent ice from forming, meaning you'll use less of that damaging road salt. But make sure you're shoveling smart. Don't dump snow directly into streets or near waterways. When the snow melts it will send all the contaminants trapped inside straight into streams. Instead, pile snow in garden beds or other flat, planted areas where the plant roots in the soil can help to filter contaminants. You can plant native, salt-tolerant plants, like winterberry shrubs or little bluestem grasses, where you plan to dump snow, adding an extra filtering buffer to your landscaping.

Leave Cleaning to the Pros

With all the grit and salt that accumulates on your vehicle during the winter months, it's tempting to grab the hose and spray it down. But before you reach for the hose, think about where all that sludge will go. The runoff from your garage likely drains directly into sewers or ditches, which will carry winter grime and road pollutants straight to streams, the Chagrin River, and Lake Erie. Consider taking your vehicle to a commercial car wash instead. They use less water and have systems in place that send runoff to water treatment areas.

For more information about residential solutions for clean water and stormwater management, visit Chagrin River Watershed Partners' (CRWP) website at: <https://crwp.org/>.