

Salt Pollution in Ontario: Exploring Challenges & Cross-Sector Solutions

Salt Use Today

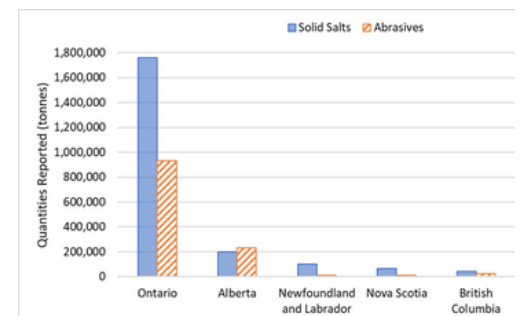
Millions of tonnes of salt are applied every year to combat ice and snow, with Ontario using the largest amounts in Canada. The most common type is sodium chloride or rock salt. While often referred to as “road salt”, around half of the salt is actually applied to other surfaces like sidewalks and parking lots.

Impacts of Salt Pollution

- Harms plants and animals, especially in aquatic environments
- Infiltrates groundwater, impacting our drinking water
- Is corrosive to cars and infrastructure, leading to costly repairs
- Excessive application can become a tripping hazard when walking

Challenges Around Salt Pollution

- Removing salt from the environment is very difficult
- Salting is not always done by certified professionals
- Current guidelines are not adequately protecting our ecosystems, especially sensitive areas
- People are worried about legal action should someone get injured on snow or ice
- People expect to be able to use surfaces the same no matter the season
- Data gaps limit our understanding: many waterbodies are not tested year-round and some not at all.
- Changing current practices requires investment in new equipment and maintenance plans



Provincial Salt quantities reported (credit: Government of Canada)

Road Salt Alternatives

*Not all alternatives are more environmentally-friendly and locally-specific research should be done before implementing them

- Physical: Increase traction by using things such as gravel, sand, or woodchips
- Chemical: Use different de-icers like magnesium chloride, calcium chloride, beet juice, and brine
- Practical: Change behaviour, reduce winter speed limits, plow more, use winter tires, and wear traction

Our Responsibilities

As an Individual

- Shovel first
- Use less salt
- Prioritize better salting practices
- Sweep leftover salt and reuse
- Try salt alternatives as appropriate

As a Business / Property Owner

- Hire certified Smart About Salt contractors
- Store salt under cover and away from vulnerable areas
- Pre-treat with brine and use advance weather monitoring
- Use treated salt on colder days to reduce reliance on rock salt
- Pay attention to “salt vulnerable areas”, track & set reduction targets

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Learn more about [Smart About Salt Council](#) and their [training and certification programs](#).
- Explore [Water Rangers](#) and pick up a [Winter testkit](#)
- Read about the costs of road salt with this post from [Canada's Ecofiscal Commission](#)
- Read about [Road Salt Toxicity](#), [Code of Practice for Road Salts](#), 5 year [Review of Progress: Code of Practice for Road Salts](#) from the Government of Canada
- Learn more about [Chloride levels in Ontario](#) from the Office of the Auditor General's report
- Access free blogs, handouts, and policy reviews with Watersheds Canada's [salt pollution toolkit](#)

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Handout created by:



Funding support:

Echo Foundation, Hodgson Family Foundation, Peterborough K.M. Hunter Charitable Foundation, and S.M. Blair Family Foundation.