



SHOW TRANSCRIPT

Advertisement

State seeks to reduce road salt use as chemical builds up in environment

Dozens of streams violate water quality standards, officials say



Updated: 10:00 PM EST Feb 20, 2020



Jennifer Crompton

News Reporter

CONCORD, N.H. — State environmental officials are raising concerns about the amount of road salt making its way into the environment.

>> [Download the FREE WMUR app](#)

Advertisement

Across the country, 24 million tons of salt are used each year to keep winter roadways safe. Northeastern states, including New Hampshire, are among the top users of salt per mile.

Each winter, hundreds of thousands of tons of sodium chloride are unloaded along Portsmouth Harbor. The road salt is then driven to storage sheds, loaded into plows and spread on roads, parking lots and walkways.

"It's making sure we can do proper roadway maintenance to maintain the safety and mobility that folks in this area expect," said Department of Transportation engineer Caleb Dobbins.

Salt's role in safety is undisputed, but its effect on the environment is of growing concern.

"We are starting to see an impact both in groundwater, what people are drinking, as well as in our surface waters that can harm our fish," said Ted Diers, of the Department of Environmental Services.

DES officials said the salt doesn't go away each season. It accumulates. Levels have increased dramatically over 20 years, and salt levels in 47 streams already violate water quality standards.

Some highly developed watersheds, such as Cobbetts Pond near the I-93 corridor, are approaching that level. Officials said salt affects not just drinking water and fish, but pets, wildlife, vegetation, soil, and roads and bridges.

"So there's really one solution, and that's to use less," Diers said.

The DOT is on board, using 20 percent less salt per lane mile on I-93 than 15 years ago. Drivers have been trained in more effective, efficient and environmentally friendly systems.

"The science is the way the salt actually works," Dobbins said. "It lowers the freezing temperature, and it keeps the snow again from freezing to the road. That's the science part of it. The art part is how to go out and apply, where do you apply it, when do you apply it."

DOT trucks have special systems that consider the location, speed and weather to help ensure that the proper amount of salt is applied.

"This truck here is equipped with the liquid system, which allows us to pretreat the salt just before it goes out on the roadway, makes it wetter, make it have less bounce and scatter in order to stay between the white lines and actually begins to allow it to start acting faster," Dobbins said.

Since 2013, a Green Snow Pro program has been implemented that gives commercial contractors a certificate and limited liability if they get educated in salt mitigation.

"It teaches them best management practices, and they learn how to calibrate their equipment and utilize that salt in the best way and also save money in the process," said Chris Avery, of the DES.

Property owners can also help limit salt use.

"After a storm, if you see a bunch of salt left over, that probably means you used too much and you want to sweep it up and maybe use it in the next storm," said Andrea Lamoreaux, vice president of NH Lakes.