Winter Salt Practices for Water Quality Improvement

Preparation for snow and ice removal becomes critical as anticipated winter storms create mounds of snow to shovel and layers of ice to melt from our sidewalks and driveways. We often make snow and ice removal easier by applying deicers like salt. However, salt degrades water quality by increasing chloride content. Besides sodium chloride, many deicers also contain chemicals like cyanide. When ice melts, the salts and chemicals dissolve and flow into street drains that lead directly to the rivers, lakes, and streams, endangering aquatic life. Follow these simple tips below to help reduce the detrimental water quality impacts deicers have on the environment:

1. **Try an alternative.**
    - Calcium magnesium acetate (CMA) was developed as a deicing alternative because it has fewer adverse environmental impacts than salt and does not cause corrosion. Although CMA is more expensive than rock salt, it is recommended for environmentally sensitive areas.
    - GeoMelt 55, a sugar beet juice product, which makes salt more effective at melting ice and snow; lowers the amount of salt needed; and is more environmentally-safe and less corrosive than traditional products.

2. **Reduce your salt use.** By limiting the amount of salt we use on sidewalks and driveways, we can reduce the amount of polluted storm water washing into our waterways.

3. **Limit access.** Limit access to your home to one entrance. For every doorway that is not used, there will be less salt running into the catch basin in your street.

Keep in mind that although there are alternative deicers, this does not mean that we can utilize more of the alternatives because they are slightly better than salt. The best solution in minimizing water quality impacts is to limit your overall use of deicing materials. For more information, visit the State of Michigan website at www.michigan.gov or the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality at www.michigan.gov/deq.