

Road Salt Impact Reaches “Critical Point”

You probably haven’t spent the last few months thinking about road salt. After all, Wisconsin’s long summer days are meant for biking and getting out on the lakes—not worrying about winter. But if you were out on a lake or hiking along a stream, chances are road salt was right there with you.

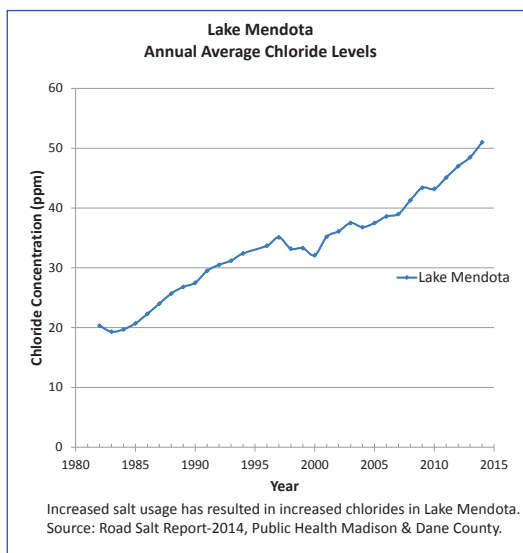
“All the salt that’s put down goes somewhere. And that somewhere is to our local waters,” said Kathy Lake, Environmental Specialist with the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District. “We’re seeing it in the lakes, we’re seeing it in the wetlands, we’re seeing it in the groundwater, we’re seeing it in our drinking water. These trends are not good.”

The long-term trends of chloride levels in the Yahara Lakes are presented in the Road Salt Report-2014, prepared by the Public Health Department for Madison and Dane Co. (See graph: Lake Mendota Annual Chloride). While these amounts are below EPA limits for impacts, the trend is clear and eventually chloride levels will negatively impact lake ecosystems.

The City is part of the new Wisconsin Salt Wise Partnership, a coalition of city and county agencies, educators and environmental groups working to get the word out about responsible salt use. The cornerstone of their campaign is an educational website, WiSaltWise.com.

Lake added, “Because salt dissolves and we don’t see it, we haven’t really paid a lot of attention to it. There also hasn’t been a lot of easy reference on what the right amount of salt is and when we should use it. So with Wisconsin Salt Wise, we’re trying to get that information out.”

According to the Road Salt Report-2014, nearly 90,000 tons of road salt was dumped on Dane County roadways in 2013 alone, not including what was used on parking lots, driveways, sidewalks and bike paths. The City of Madison’s Streets department has been working hard to reduce road salt use by training applicators to apply only the effective amount. Additionally, Madison only salts major roads and bus routes, or roughly 45% of the street surface in the city. Sand is used on all other streets. This practice alone dramatically reduces the salt used by Madison compared to other municipalities of comparable size.



“That salt is still around, but it’s dissolved in our lakes, streams and groundwater. So it’s really out of sight out of mind,” says Madison Water Utility Water Quality Manager Joe Grande. “What we’re trying to do is raise awareness year-round so that people are thinking about it. And when they’re out paddling or swimming or whatever, they’re thinking about the quality of that water.”

Lake said people should be hearing more about WiSaltWise.com as winter approaches. And she hopes this will be the year that homeowners, private applicators and municipalities come together to make a change. “We are reaching a critical point. There’s an awareness now that we are all part of the solution. We all have the ability to change our own behavior, our own expectations, and potentially really improve our water quality.”

Flushable?

Never flush:

- Baby wipes, disinfectant wipes, moist wipes, etc.
- Vitamins, medicines or other pharmaceuticals
- Toilet bowl scrub pads
- Swiffer® products
- Napkins (*paper or cloth*)
- Paper towels
- Dental floss
- Fats, oils and greases
- Sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms or any non-organic materials
- Wash cloths, towels, rags, underwear or any cloth items
- Band-Aids® or dressings
- Plastic bags or wrappers
- Kitty litter (*even products labeled as flushable*)
- Cat feces or bagged dog feces
- Fish gravel

Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District