

Winter Time Pollution Prevention

Water pollution and conservation are important issues during the spring and summer months; however, there are many things that we can do during the winter months that will help reduce water pollution and help conserve water. Below are three topics with several tips on how to make a difference this winter:



1. Too Much Salt

When the snow and ice melt after a winter storm, the water flow will take with it anything that it collects on the ground and wash it down storm drains. This means that melting ice will carry the deicer materials that we use to clear our driveways and walkways down storm drains and into local waterways. The chlorides that make up the deicers can harm aquatic wildlife, affect nearby plant growth in your yard, and can remain trapped in your soils. Luckily there are alternatives to conventional rock salt deicers that are easy to purchase and will also help in keeping our pathways safe! Here are some helpful tips that will keep your pavements clear and local streams cleaner!

- ❖ Removing freshly fallen snow before it has a chance to freeze and harden into ice is one of the more effective ways of keeping your pavements clear. Deicers work better when there is only a thin layer of ice or snow.
- ❖ If you are using traditional rock salt, the recommended application is a *handful for one square yard*. Using more salt than this will not make the ice melt faster; it will only end up costing you more money and the salt will be washed away by the stormwater!
- ❖ Pay attention to the type of deicer material your applying so that you reduce the risk of damaging your sidewalk and driveway.
- ❖ Mixing sand in with the deicer will also aid in melting the snow and ice and allow you to cut back on the amount of rock salt that is being used. Sand and regular brand kitty litter will also add traction to the surface as well. **But remember, if there is left over sand and kitty litter on your walkway or driveway, then use a broom to clean it up. Using a hose to wash the sand and kitty litter away will push the material into nearby storm drains and potentially cause a clog or back-up of the drains, so put that broom to work! *Fertilizer is not an appropriate substitution for any of the above materials***



2. Losing Water

Bursting pipes in the winter time can cause a strain on water supply levels and also on a homeowner's wallet. By preventing pipe bursts and water loss now, you can help conserve water and money!

- ❖ If you have outside spigots, turn them off during the winter months to prevent them from bursting due to the cold temperatures.
- ❖ You may be able to turn the spigots off by an inside valve, and then drain the remaining water from the pipes.
- ❖ Make sure that your water pipes are insulated properly and check for leaky pipes now before freezing temperatures arrive.



Flammable



Corrosive



Toxic



Explosive

3. Household Hazardous Waste

It is important to dispose and use our cleaning products appropriately. The water that goes down your sink drain also carries residues from your home, and many harsh household chemicals are not removed by sewage-treatment or septic systems.

Household Hazardous Waste is any household product which is labeled:

CAUTION, DANGER, FLAMMABLE, EXPLOSIVE, TOXIC, WARNING, CORROSIVE, POISON and VOLATILE or a combination of these characteristics

Here are a few things that will help reduce these problems with household chemicals:

- ❖ Read your labels and know what is in the product before using it.
- ❖ Consider using products that are “environmentally friendly.” These products will advertise that they do not contain phosphates, chlorine, ammonia, etc. (**all of which contribute to water pollution**)
- ❖ Store household chemicals in a dry area with the lids secured tightly.
- ❖ Use only the recommended amount of the product.
- ❖ Never dispose of chemicals in storm drains (**they lead directly to nearby rivers**).
- ❖ When disposing of household chemicals, check to see if there are special instructions and/or collection sites for your convenience. In Berks County, the Berks County Solid Waste Authority hosts Household Hazardous Waste Collections in the Spring and Fall to help homeowners dispose of Household chemicals. For additional

information please visit the Berks County Solid Waste Authority website at <http://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/swa/Pages/default.aspx> or call 610-478-6362.

(This article is complements of the Berks County MS4 Steering Committee and Cooperative Education Program. For additional information please visit <http://www.co.berks.pa.us/Dept/Planning/Pages/MS4%20Cooperative%20Education%20Program.aspx>)