

Stream-Friendly Snow Removal

We are often aware of rainwater and runoff in the summer months. The puddles and mud make it hard to overlook. But stormwater pollution carries on into the winter months as well. In northeast Ohio, snow and ice removal is a fact of life, but the methods we use can have an effect on the health of our streams. Remember, when the ground is frozen, it acts as an impervious surface, and pollution is more likely to run into a nearby stream or storm drain. Below are some simple ideas for keeping your sidewalk and driveway safe and keeping stormwater runoff cleaner.

Manual snow removal - Even if you are going to salt, remove as much snow as possible first. Break out the shovel, snowblower, and garden hoe. Chemical deicers work best on a thin layer of snow or ice. If you are using a snowblower, be careful with the gas as you fill up the tank. The garden hoe can be used to scrape ice, but shouldn't be used to chip at the surface - it can chip the concrete.

Try adding traction - Instead of getting down to bare surface, consider if there is enough traction in the snow. Small amounts of sand can be used to increase traction, but too much sand will cause problems in the stormwater system. Sand should not be used in areas that drain directly into the stormwater system.

More isn't better - Do you need access to every door of your house, or can you just de-ice the one you use every day? Does the entire patio need to be bare, or do you just need a path across it to the driveway? The recommended application rate for rock salt is about a cup per square yard. Adding more won't speed up the melting. Calcium chloride works at one cup per three square yards. Combine deicers with scraping, especially in the late afternoon when things are at their warmest.

Skip the fertilizer treatment - In the past, people have been advised to use fertilizers or other urea-containing products to de-ice with the theory that it would end up fertilizing the lawn as well. Unfortunately the ground is frozen and the grass is not taking up nutrients, so most of that fertilizer runs off in the melt water. Overuse of fertilizer can also burn vegetation, especially conifers and evergreen broadleaf plants such as azalea and rhododendron the next time you remove snow.

Be wary of glycol - Many 'pet-safe' products contain ethylene glycol or propylene glycol. Both are toxic to aquatic organisms, and ethylene glycol is also toxic to mammals. They both decrease the amount of oxygen in streams, and break down into other potentially unsafe chemicals.

(Source, Cuyahoga County Soil and Water Conservation District)