



Motion to IEC

15/27/2025

Minimizing Salt Pollution that poison rivers and streams

Summary: When I was the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, I wrote a report to the Ontario Legislature, Back to Basics: Clean Water. It documented the immense damage being done in Ontario by salt pollution of freshwater, especially rivers and streams. Excess salt poisons most freshwater ecosystems, and is having a serious adverse effect on Toronto's rivers and streams.

Road salt is designated under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act as a toxic substance because of its serious irreversible, environmental and public health damage, as well as accelerated deterioration of public and private infrastructure.

Much of the excess salt comes from heavy use by private contractors which the provincial government has refused to regulate. Private owners and contractors frequently use grossly excessive amounts of salt in the hope of protecting themselves from occupier liability slip and fall lawsuits.

Toronto is doing the best we can to minimize over salting and salt pollution in our city, but we lack the policy and regulatory tools to reduce excess salt used by private contractors. The provincial government should adopt a single set of provincially endorsed best management practices, require salt-smart training of private contractors who applies salt as part of their business, and legislation that limits the liability of those who adhere to the provincially endorsed standards.

The Ontario Salt Pollution Coalition has therefore requested a resolution from our City calling for provincial action on salt pollution. So far, such resolutions have been passed by Muskoka, Georgina, Waterloo, Malahide, Sudbury, North Perth, and Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Recommendations:

1. City Council request the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to adopt limited occupier liability legislation that protects property owners and managers, including municipalities, from slip and fall lawsuits, provided that they have taken all reasonable steps to follow Provincial best-management practices for salt use in controlling snow and ice.

2. City Council request the Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to work urgently with key stakeholders to develop legislation, including enforceable contractor training and a single set of Provincially-endorsed standard best management practices for snow and ice management.
3. City Council direct the Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Services to continue to minimize the use of road salt as much as possible while maintaining safety on roads, parking lots and sidewalks.

Councillor Dianne Saxe

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