

Prepping for snowy streets

Geneva testing adding beet juice to road salt

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Drivers might notice something is different with the city's road salt this winter. Some of it will be golden-brown in color.

That is because beet juice will be added to the salt as part of an experiment this year to be more environmentally friendly.

Adding beet juice means the city can use about 30 percent less salt pre-wetted with liquid calcium chloride. Geneva Public Works Director Dan Dinges said non-biodegradable calcium chloride can make its way into ponds and rivers eventually through storm drains and adversely affect aquatic life. He said it does not affect drinking water because it is pretreated.

Over the past years, Streets Superintendent Steve LeMaire said the city staff has been attending seminars and networking with other communities and the DuPage River/Salt Creek Workgroup to review using nonchloride materials.

"Changing to a beet juice pre-wet will not only produce better de-icing results, but will reduce the amount of chloride that is applied to the environment and water systems," LeMaire said.

The beet juice also lowers the operating temperature of the salt, making it work in very cold weather.

Another way the city reduces its chloride impact on the environment is by simply not salting every street. High-volume collector streets, such as Routes 31 and 25, State Street and hilly roads close to the Fox River are among the streets that get salted.

"We're trying to conserve our salt use in general," Dinges said.

But this means that most residential side streets and parking lots never get salted.

"We have gotten complaints," Dinges said. "But once we explain to them why, I think most of them understand."

And while surrounding communities were scrambling for extra emergency salt last winter, Geneva is able to keep reserve salt despite the fact that past winters have had very productive snowfall, Dinges added.

"We managed pretty well last winter," Dinges said.



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Geneva has been able to keep salt reserves even with the past few snowy winters.

Staff photo by Steve Bittinger

A salty situation

Here's a look at each community's salt use and cost compared to last year. In 2008, a harsh winter and a shortage of salt resulted in busted budgets.

	Tons ordered in 2008	Tons used in 2008	Budgeted cost in 2008	Actual cost in 2008	Miles of roadway	Miles typically salted	Tons ordered for 2009	Budgeted cost for 2009
Bartlett	5,000	4,000	\$200,000	\$600,000	141	141	1,500	\$96,870
Carol Stream	4,000	4,000	\$132,090	\$243,120	110	80	4,000	\$261,120
Geneva	2,400	2,150	\$120,000	\$139,000	244	N/A	2,200	\$129,800
Glen Ellyn	2,016	2,000	\$100,600	\$246,500	86	86	2,000	\$200,000
Lombard	3,967	3,500	\$130,000	\$477,785	135	135	4,600	\$352,038
St. Charles	6,400	4,269.25	\$303,189	\$233,399.90	171	114	5,000	\$312,285
Wheaton	3,300	2,900	\$138,600	\$348,000	157	157	3,300	\$252,549