

# CHLORIDE – SALT – FRIEND AND FOE

We need salt to live, but too much of a good thing can be harmful.



**Salt is ever-present in our everyday lives. We love it on French fries, tomatoes and on the rims of certain drinks. But, too much salt in our diets can be harmful, just as too much salt in our lakes and streams can harm aquatic life. Road ice-melt and water softeners are major culprits.**

## How is chloride harmful to the environment?

- Even low levels of chloride can have a negative effect on fish and insect productivity, even at lower levels.
- Road salt impacts land and wetland plants because they take it up through their roots and their community structure suffers.
- Salt-laden soil can lose its ability to retain water and store nutrients, making it prone to erosion and sediment runoff.
- Our pets are at risk of getting sick when they eat salt, lick it off their paws or drink salty snow melt/runoff. Their paw pads can become irritated as well.
- Some birds, like finches and house sparrows, can die from ingesting de-icing salt.



## The trouble with water softeners

It's not pleasant to have stiff clothes or dingy drinking glasses when the water coming into your home is too hard. Soft water can also extend the life of appliances and save on water and energy costs. But, it's important to know that water softeners produce chloride that can seep into groundwater from on-site septic systems and from wastewater treatment facilities that aren't designed to remove it, so that chloride can end up in rivers, lakes and streams where high levels of chloride are toxic to fish and aquatic life.

In some communities, the composition of the water calls for water softeners, but there are ways to know if one is really needed and what you can do about using a water softener.

**See the reverse for actions you can take to minimize the amount of chloride – salt – released into the ecosystem.**



**PeopleService** INC.  
Water & Wastewater Professionals

# HOW TO MINIMIZE CHLORIDE – SALT – RELEASE IN THE ENVIRONMENT

## Minimize salt as an option to remove snow and ice

A little bit of salt de-icer goes a long way. After shoveling or removing what you can manually, try a little salt on ice at first. Read the directions on the package. In general, 8 ounces of scattered de-icer can cover a 20-foot driveway or 20 sidewalk squares. Apply and wait a few minutes to

gauge how well it's working. If no one is at risk of using that walkway for a time and the sun is shining, try letting the sun do the work. FYI, when the temperature is below 15 degrees, salt won't work.

## What to do with water softeners

First, have your water tested for hardness. Hard water is an outcome of minerals, principally calcium and magnesium, that are present in the water. Many cities soften water at the drinking water source so a separate water softener is not necessary.

### Replace old water softeners

If you still have a time-clock water softener, it's time to replace it with the new, demand-initiated type. This type significantly reduces salt use and can save time and money.

### Reduce the use

You can lower the salt setting on your water softener to determine "how low you can go." You may find that a big decrease in salt has little impact on clothes softness and water spots.

### Consider the source

Other ways to lessen soft water use is to install high-efficiency shower heads and have a certified plumber disconnect water that doesn't need to be softened from the water softener source. This includes the hose, toilets and other cold water uses.

