Don't Let Salt Snowball Into a Big Problem

New Jersey American Water and The Watershed Institute Urge Responsible Winter Salt Use to Protect Waterways and Wildlife

CAMDEN, N.J., Jan. 15, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- With winter underway and the possibility of snowstorms, New Jersey American Water and The Watershed Institute are reminding residents, businesses and municipalities that excessive use of road salt can have serious environmental consequences. While salt helps keep roads and sidewalks safe, its runoff can harm drinking water sources, aquatic ecosystems and infrastructure long after the snow has melted. In some cases, increased sodium and chloride levels in source water can even cause a temporary salty taste in tap water, though these levels do not pose a health risk for most people.

"Salt doesn't just disappear when the ice melts. It moves into our rivers, streams and groundwater. Every winter we see rising chloride levels that can disrupt ecosystems and are extremely difficult for drinking water systems to treat. Using salt responsibly helps protect public health and our natural resources," said Shawn M. LaTourette, commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP).

"Every extra handful of salt matters. When we use more than we need, it ends up in our drinking water sources," said Shealynn O'Toole Source Water Protection program manager, New Jersey American Water. "Responsible use of winter salt keeps roads safe and protects the environment and source water."

The impact of road salt doesn't end when winter does. "High salt levels can persist and even worsen under drought conditions and have lasting effects year-round. During the summer months, salt run-off can harm fish and other aquatic life and even encourage the growth of harmful algal blooms," said Erin Stretz, assistant director of science at The Watershed Institute.

To raise awareness and encourage sustainable road salting practices, Winter Salt Week 2026 will take place Jan. 26–30. This national initiative, led by Wisconsin Salt Wise in partnership with utilities, regulators, and environmental organizations, promotes responsible salt use through education, community engagement and resources for municipalities and homeowners. The campaign emphasizes that safety and sustainability can go hand in hand — and that small changes in how we use salt can make a big difference.

As part of Winter Salt Week, experts are sharing practical steps that residents and municipalities can take immediately to reduce environmental impacts without compromising safety. These tips are simple, cost-effective and proven to help protect water quality:

- **Shovel first:** Clearing snow before it turns to ice reduces the need for de-icing.
- **Use only what's needed:** If you need to use salt, a 12-ounce coffee mug holds about one pound of salt, which is enough for a 20-foot driveway.
- **Spread efficiently:** Leave 3 inches of space between granules for effective coverage.
- **Sweep up excess:** Remove leftover salt from dry pavement to prevent runoff.
- **Switch to brine:** Applying a liquid brine instead of salt crystals can reduce the total amount of salt applied by 30-50%.
- **Reevaluate contracts:** Businesses can pay snow-removal contractors by area cleared, not salt applied.

For localized information about winter salting, visit NJ Salt Watch, a free community science program funded by NJDEP and managed by the Watershed Institute that provides residents, businesses and municipalities the opportunity to measure and share impacts of road salt on local streams and lakes. Learn more and register at njwatershedwatch.org/road-salt/. For more information about winter salt, register for daily webinars during Winter Salt Week at www.wintersaltweek.org.

About New Jersey American Water
New Jersey American Water, a subsidiary of American Water (NYSE: AWK), is the largest regulated water utility in the state, providing safe, clean, reliable and affordable water and wastewater services to approximately 2.9

million people. For more information, visit www.newjerseyamwater.com and follow New Jersey American Water on LinkedIn, Facebook, X, and Instagram.

About The Watershed Institute
The Watershed Institute is dedicated to keeping New Jersey's water clean, safe and healthy. Founded in 1949, The Watershed Institute protects and restores water and the environment through conservation, advocacy, science and education. For more information about the Watershed, www.thewatershed.org or call (609) 737-3735.

SOURCE American Water

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