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Subject: NEWS RELEASE: New Report Illustrates How NYS Can Curb Its Appetite for Damaging Road Salt

NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Monday, February 23, 2009

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**ADIRONDACK COUNCIL REPORT PRESCRIBES
“Low Sodium Diet”
FOR NEW YORK’S ROADS & HIGHWAYS**

New Report Shows Road Salt Contaminates Clean Drinking Water; Harms Plants, Wildlife, Roads, Vehicles & Bridges; Damages Surface Waters and Kills Aquatic Life

ALBANY, N.Y. – A new report issued by the Adirondack Council today shows that road salt is causing widespread drinking water contamination and environmental damage in New York State. The environmental group called on state and local officials to make changes to the way their road crews store and use road salt, sand and other de-icing chemicals.

“Some of the Adirondack Park’s most popular and scenic water bodies are close to roads and highways where road salt use is heavy for five months of the year or more,” said Brian L. Houseal, Executive Director of the Adirondack Council. “For example, the Cascade Lakes, south of Lake Placid, are mere inches from the edge of a steep, curvy and wind-swept Route 73. All of the trees and brush that once grew between the lakes and the road are now dead. Four decades of heavy salt use has left a layer of salt water at the bottom of those lakes that is harmful to most native life. Measures are now being taken to reduce the amount of salt used on this stretch of highway. But this is only one place among thousands that are being damaged statewide.

“Another example is the uncovered salt pile sitting next to Lake Colby, near Saranac Lake,” Houseal said. “Snow and rain are melting the salt into the water, which is slowly killing Lake Colby. In Lake George, chloride levels more than doubled between 1980 and 2000, and are still climbing. The same happened to Chazy Lake over a span of only four years.”

Houseal said the Council’s 40-page report, “Low Sodium Diet: Curbing New York’s Appetite for Damaging Road Salt” is available on the Council’s web site (www.adirondackcouncil.org) and includes recommendations such as:

- State incentives to local government to employ more effective anti-icing measures prior to major snow storms, which reduces the need for de-icing after the storm,
- Expansion of the state’s Road Weather Information System, which employs tiny, automated weather stations to report conditions back to central plow/salt truck dispatchers,
- An expanded role for NYS Department of Transportation crews, whose equipment is more modern and whose expertise usually far surpasses that of local government crews,
- The state should provide incentives for the creation and use of additional chemical alternatives to road salt,
- State and local officials should perform a risk assessment on their annual winter road maintenance plans to determine which of their practices are the most harmful to local water, plants and wildlife, so those practices can be avoided or modified,
- New York should adopt an aggressive approach to encourage safer winter driving, which can include lower winter speed limits, well-placed variable message boards, and greater enforcement of safe speed limits during winter storms.

Houseal explained that anti-icing measures can help prevent ice from forming on the roadway, which is better than trying to melt ice that has already formed. However, laying too much salt on the road before a storm reduces its effectiveness and can be worse than using too little.

Roadside weather stations, such as those in use on portions of the Adirondack Northway (I-87), allow state truck dispatchers to save time, money and de-icing chemicals by identifying which specific locations need immediate attention, and which don’t.

DOT road crews have the proper equipment and training to carefully manage salt distribution along state highways. The same is often not true of local road crews. Allowing DOT to handle more road mileage would give local crews the time they need to care for local side streets and parking lots, while saving local tax dollars.

Risk assessments would allow state and local officials to move away from the most harmful local practices, first by identifying them and second by directing employees to develop methods for avoiding them. This could include covering uncovered salt storage piles; moving salt storage away from lakes and rivers; and, building new highway maintenance facilities far away from surface waters and significant underground water supplies.

“Public education is the final, but perhaps the most important, recommendation,” Houseal said. “If the general public was aware of the damage we are doing to ourselves and our natural resources, they would be shouting for alternatives. And more people might think twice about venturing on to an icy highway during a storm.”

Founded in 1975, the Adirondack Council is a leading environmental research, education and advocacy organization with members in all 50 United States. Its mission is to ensure the wild character and ecological integrity of New York's 9,300-square-mile Adirondack Park. The Council is privately funded. It neither solicits nor accepts donations from government agencies or any other taxpayer-supported sources.

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