

De-icers can cause damage

MANHATTAN — Carefully limited use of de-icers can boost sidewalk and driveway safety, yet cause little to no injury to concrete surfaces or nearby plants.

"Unfortunately, though, de-icers seem to be the kind of product that makes people think, 'If a little is good, a lot should be even better.' That can lead to problems — which typically won't show up until spring or summer," said Ward Upham, Kansas State University Research and Extension horticulturist.

Often, the worst cases result when buyer-appliers don't understand the products' intended use.

"De-icers are not a snow shovel substitute.... The best way to promote safe outdoor conditions is to shovel as soon as a storm stops. That way, you won't have the compacted ice that results so quickly when someone walks or drives on new-fallen snow," Upham said.

Once ice enters the picture, however, applying a de-icer can help loosen snow and ice from pavement. That, in turn, can make shoveling easier. In general, the thinner the ice, the more effective de-icing is likely to be.

"Breaking the bond between ice and pavement also helps you do a complete enough job that you don't leave slick spots or chem-

ical-laden slush behind. Those things can become hazards.... In many cases, they also can lead to pitted paving and burned plants," Upham said.

No de-icer is perfect on all counts, he said. Plus, the five main ingredients most often used as chemical de-icers have differing abilities.

"People who don't know what they're buying can expect too much of a particular product. So, when they don't achieve the results they want, they often try applying 'just a little more,'" Upham said.

Major De-Icers Differ

The horticulturist outlined the abilities of de-icer ingredients as follows:

- Calcium chloride — the traditional ice-melting product. It will melt ice down to 25 degrees below zero. It gets to work fairly quickly. But, it forms slippery, slimy surfaces on concrete surfaces. Excessive use can harm plant roots.

- Sodium chloride (rock salt) — the cheapest option. It remains effective down to about 12 degrees. It can damage plants and also metals and soils.

- Potassium chloride — a natural material also used as fertilizer and a salt substitute. It can melt ice when temperatures are in the teens. The compound's high salt

index can lead to serious plant injury, above and below ground.

- Urea (carbonyl diamide) — a fertilizer sometimes used to melt ice in temperatures as low as 21 degrees. Urea is less corrosive than sodium chloride, and less likely than potassium chloride to burn plants. It can contaminate water with nitrates.

- Calcium magnesium acetate (CMA) — a newer and more costly product made from dolomitic limestone and acetic acid (the principal compound of vinegar). Its performance decreases below 20 degrees. It has little effect on plants or concrete surfaces. It helps prevent snow particles from sticking to each other or to paved surfaces.

De-Icers Don't Add Traction

"A final problem is that after people shovel, they sometimes distribute more de-icer, as if it were designed to provide traction for walking. Big mistake," Upham said.

A scattering of sand is the traditional way to create traction, the horticulturist said. But, a sprinkling of natural clay kitty litter has fans now, too. Cracked corn and bird seed are gaining notice as "green" possibilities that both provide traction and serve as winter bird food.

What do you do with too much snow?



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

The Colby area got anywhere from 6 to 9 inches of snow from Sunday to Tuesday and with city plow crews piling it up into makeshift medians, one might wonder: what do you do with too much snow. The answer is to dump it in the park. Work crews used front end loaders and dump trucks today to begin moving the snow out of the streets to dump sights at Buffalo Park, much to the relief of motorists and the delight of area children.

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