



keeping salt from the Wound This Winter

Wind Point Water Wellness

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Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization formed in 1998 by the Department of Natural Resources and other watershed stakeholders to restore, protect and sustain the five watersheds of southeastern Wisconsin.

Ah! The winter season is upon us. Family, friends... leaves and ice. While we tend not to think about yardwork during this cold, snowy season, it's good to be aware of our individual impacts on water quality when removing snow and ice from our properties. Recently, the Village adopted the Wind Point Watershed Restoration Plan, a comprehensive document based on science and community input. The Village of Wind Point has adopted the Plan and implementation of its prioritized recommendations are underway with Root-Pike Water-



shed Initiative Network (Root-Pike WIN) taking the lead.

Water ... shed? What is that? A watershed is an area of land where surface water drains to a common location. In the Wind Point watershed, most of this water flows into Lake Michigan swiftly via direct drainage. Every resident in the watershed has the opportunity to have a positive impact on water quality in the area's streams and Lake Michigan! Read on for simple tips to help reduce stormwater runoff pollution.

Over the past 150 years, the watershed has become more heavily populated and developed. In the process of developing agricultural, residential and commercial uses for the land,

many natural habitats were replaced by land usages that reduced the amount of stormwater that could soak into the ground. Prairies and wetlands were replaced with farm fields, roads, parking lots, roofs, patios, driveways and sidewalks, all which are impermeable to stormwater. Stormwater runoff is rainfall that flows over the ground surface. It is created when rain or snow falls on roads, your driveways, parking lots, rooftops and other surfaces that do not allow water to soak into the ground. Instead, the water rushes into ditches or storm sewers and travels swiftly into Lake Michigan or ends up in streams or ravines, picking up pollutants as it travels along the way.

Pollution sources include fallen leaves, grass clippings, pesticides and fertilizers, dog feces, oil leaking from automobiles, litter, and in the winter months, salt. Stormwater runoff is currently the number one cause of stream impairment in urban areas.

How can Wind Pointers help keep our waters clean? Even in the winter, homeowners can do things on their own property to help reduce stormwater runoff pollution.

Have you purchased a snow-melt

product for the winter yet? While clearing snow and ice from your property this season, please keep in mind the impacts of salt on the environment, human health and the well-being of your pets. While salt is great for melting ice in certain conditions — it also harms plants and animals, pollutes our water, damages buildings and corrodes vehicles, roads and bridges. Once you put salt down, it doesn't go away. Instead, it travels and dissolves into our lakes and streams. Using the right amount of salt maximizes safety.

How does winter salting affect pets? Keep a close eye on your pets, particularly dogs, around sidewalk salt. The two most important concerns for pet owners regarding salt are ingestion and paw health. Ingestion of salt by eating it, licking salty paws, and by drinking snow melt can potentially produce effects such as vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, excessive thirst, weakness, low blood pressure, decreased muscle function among other symptoms. In severe cases, it can be life threatening. If your pet ingests a snow melt product, make note of the ingredients and contact your veterinarian right away if you notice symptoms. Exposure of your pet's paws to salt can produce irritation, inflammation, and cracking of the feet pads that can be prone to infection and are slow to heal. If an animal has walked through the

product, rolled in it, or placed its face in a bag of ice melt, bathe the animal and monitor it for skin irritation and any of the above symptoms. Encourage your pup to play in the snow and avoid the salt!

Surface and ground water monitoring in Wisconsin continue to show increasing trends in chloride and sodium levels, although the levels are not yet a human health hazard. Sodium in drinking water is a health concern for individuals restricted to low-sodium diets due to hypertension (high blood pressure). Limiting the amount of salt you spread on your own property can help keep our local waters well within the safe range for sodium concentration. Here's another simple suggestion to help reduce salt runoff: if any salt crystals remain on a paved surface after the snow or ice has melted, consider sweeping them up to use in the next storm. You've just prevented the unused or unneeded crystals from dissolving and being swept away in the surrounding snow melt and scored yourself some reusable salt. Way to go!

Alternatives to traditional salt can be safer for our overall health. This winter, why not try using ashes, sawdust or sand instead of salt? A great time to experiment is in temperatures below 15 °F when salt becomes ineffective anyway. There are also many commercial road salt alternative products available. For best results on your property, educate yourself on available products and spread them at the application rates in the temperature range recommended on the label.

With a little homework, it's easy to strike a balance between safely clearing snow and salt from your property and reducing impacts to the environment, human health, and pet health. 'Tis' the season to consider alternatives to salt whenever possible this winter. Doing this will keep salt from the wound — so to speak — the impaired waterways that flow through the Wind Point area.

