



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Jon Monger
Director

February 25, 2025

Friends of Sligo Creek
P.O. Box 11572
Takoma Park, MD 20913

Dear Friends of Sligo Creek:

Thank you for your letter concerning Montgomery County (the County)'s winter maintenance and salt management programs, and particularly for your diligence in water quality monitoring and reporting.

As you've stated, a key challenge in reducing road salt use is maintaining balance between effective snow removal, public safety, and environmental stewardship. I can assure you we take our role in this very seriously. We continually seek to improve understanding among the public and other County departments about wise salt use and the impact of over-salting. We are engaging various County agencies in developing and implementing effective salt management practices that balance public safety with environmental responsibility. Improving stream conditions and water quality requires improved operations as well as public education. Also, as enforcement abilities are limited, we are exploring options to reduce salt application through policy change and program implementation.

We, too, are gravely concerned by the increased over-salting observed and reported internally and by many citizens. Please continue to report your observations through the 311 system, which enables us to analyze all reports collectively. One of the difficulties in serving the County's salting needs is public service requests for road salting. During the January 5-6th 2025 winter storm event, MCDOT received more than 3,000 service requests for additional salt on residential streets. This shows a need for more public education on passable roadway expectations during winter events.

The County participates in the outreach and technical jurisdictional workgroups led by WSSC Water. Organizations in these workgroups include Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (MWCOC), Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB), Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NOVA), Virginia Department of Transportation, Fairfax County, University of Maryland, George Mason University, Howard and Prince George's Counties, Cities of Alexandria, Gaithersburg, Manassas, Reston and Rockville, and Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA), among others. We follow research, educational techniques and success stories from other jurisdictions that we can apply to our own region. MDE has now completed 2 cycles of their smart salting contractor certification program in which DEP has encouraged County participation, and a few departments have sent representatives to it.

I'd like to highlight some improvements that have been made over the past year:

1. **Hiring of New Staff:** In the fall of 2024, DEP hired a new staff member to lead the Salt Management Plan, with a focus on interagency coordination and identifying programmatic improvements. This initiative seeks to ensure that best management practices are applied across all County agencies, with the goal of minimizing over-salting and reducing the environmental impact of salt usage.
2. **Streamlined the collection of MC311 oversalting reports to ensure rapid response times:** We have expanded the MC311 service request for reporting dirt and glass in roadways to include excess road salt. I'd like to point out, this came to fruition because of FOSC's strong and appreciated advocacy. DEP is tracking reports of excess salt and working with the appropriate County agencies to address proper salt management practices in these areas. Members of the public are encouraged to continue reporting salt spills to MC311.
3. **Completion of the 2024 MCDOT Salt Management Plan:** In 2024, DEP collaborated with MCDOT to complete the 2024 Salt Management Plan (SMP), a document that captures salting best management practices (BMPs) that MCDOT follows to reduce environmental impacts. This is a living document that will be updated annually as BMPs improve.
4. **Participation in Salt Week:** Winter salt awareness week (January 27th to 31st) recently took place which was the first of its kind on the topic in Maryland and Montgomery County. DEP worked with IWLA and ICPRB to plan a live, local event on January 31st at the Izaak Walton league headquarters. There were about 60 people in attendance and the [webinars](#) are recorded and available for view [here](#). Media coverage of the event can be seen [here](#) and [here](#). We plan to make this an annual event and expand the effort, connecting with more jurisdictions across the state.
5. **Salt Wise campaign:** DEP developed the [Salt Wise campaign](#) a few years ago which is expanded every year. As winter salt use concerns and levels continued to rise, it became apparent that more awareness, education, and outreach was necessary. The campaign includes a website dedicated to educating residents, employees, businesses, and property owners on smart salting techniques. We have expanded our use of social media and purchased applicator scoops that contain salt wise messaging in 7 different languages for residents' use. DEP has also worked with the IWLA to support and expand the [Salt Watch program](#) through several grants. Thank you for being a part of the program. We are currently partnering with IWLA to provide educational programming at several libraries through the winter season.
6. **MCDOT Sensitive Watershed Salt Cleanup:** This winter season, MCDOT began an initiative to revisit salted areas located in sensitive watersheds throughout the County after winter storm events to remove excess salt from roadways. After the January 5th-6th 2025 winter event, MCDOT swept up more than 50 tons of salt from these areas. They are working on streamlining their data tracking for these cleanup events and are working to better publicize future cleanup removal efforts.

I'd also like to highlight areas where we are continuing to make progress:

1. **Expanding the MCDOT SMP to include more County Departments and Agencies:** DEP is collaborating with DGS and MCPS to update the 2025 Montgomery County Salt Management Plan to include MCDOT, DGS, and MCPS. The current MCDOT plan only includes county-maintained roadways. The goal moving forward is to expand salt minimization efforts through collaboration between agencies. The formation of an inter-agency salt management team will ensure that every County agency is working towards the same goals to minimize environmental impacts during winter storm maintenance.
2. **Researching sodium chloride alternatives:** Through collaboration with other agencies throughout the country, DEP is considering how to implement sodium chloride alternatives in County agencies and encourage their use in privately-owned areas.
3. **Increasing private landowner collaboration:** As the majority of impervious surface in the County is managed through private ownership or HOAs, DEP will broaden outreach to these parties to encourage the reduction of the use of traditional road salt and the best management practice of cleaning up excess salt after a storm has passed.
4. **Improving salt management contracts:** County agencies are exploring ways to increase contractor oversight and incentivize minimal salt use. This is an ongoing process that we're confident can lead to impactful changes within publicly maintained areas of the County.

Thank you for being such diligent stewards of the environment and compiling this water quality information for our attention. We look forward to a continued partnership working towards our common goal of protecting our environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon Monger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jon Monger
Director, Department of Environmental Protection
Montgomery County