

Safety and the environment

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal provides the highest possible level of service and safety in the most environmentally responsible way.

Salt and the environment

The use of salt has been minimized in some areas to protect water supplies or in areas that are environmentally sensitive. Instead, a sand or sand/salt mixture is used. Sand/salt mixtures are used on gravel roads and certain sections of paved roads located near wells or ground water supplies.

Highway salting

Salt is the most effective and affordable anti-icing agent, and in Nova Scotia, we use approximately 240,000 tonnes of road salt each winter to keep our highways and roads safe.

Sand/salt mixtures

Sand/salt mixtures are less corrosive to bridges and your vehicle, and has only enough salt to prevent the sand from freezing in clumps. A sand/salt mixture provides better traction on icy surfaces, but it does not melt snow from road surfaces.

Did you know...

That salt is not an effective de-icer when it dips below -10°C during the day, or below -7°C at night? That's why we apply sand when temperatures dip that low.

Slow down.
It's winter.

Balancing safety and cost

Every effort is being made to meet the need for safe highways and to eliminate salt waste. Salt rate application controls are installed on all salting units, and newer units have self-regulating controls. 250 units are equipped with GPS technology which track the location and operation of the snow and ice control equipment. All new units are equipped with pre-wetting capabilities which allows for the application of a salt brine mixture, improving the effectiveness of the salt. The salt brine adheres to the road surface and starts working immediately. With this type of application the salt sticks to the road and does not bounce into the roadside vegetation.

The Department uses an electronic Road Weather Information System (RWIS). Currently there are 39 RWIS sites across the province which gives Department staff real-time information on roadway and atmospheric conditions, which is updated every 20 minutes during winter season. The data from these sites is transmitted to a contracted forecaster who uses it to produce pavement and site specific forecasts for front line staff. The data allows staff to enhance the Department's anti-icing program (pre-wetting with salt brine) by having accurate and timely access to forecasts. Expansion of the RWIS network is an ongoing program.

The Department also uses a fully automated road condition reports system (RCRS) that is accessible via the Internet and telephone, in both English and French. Department staff input current road conditions in the system three times daily at 6 am, 1 pm and 4 pm. Significant changes to road conditions can be input at any time between these established update times. The information on the various road segments is automatically fed into the provinces 511 system. Anyone travelling can call 511 and receive the latest road condition information.