

Martin O'Malley, *Governor*
Anthony G. Brown, *Lt. Governor*



James T. Smith, Jr., *Secretary*
Melinda B. Peters, *Administrator*

December 17, 2013

To the Editor:

This time of year, highway conditions play a large part in planning our activities. Highways are the routes home to our loved ones, the lifeblood of our economy and the vital links to medical treatment. At the State Highway Administration, the science of clearing snow and ice is on our minds long before the first flakes fall and well after the last snowman melts. We procure more efficient equipment, research innovative materials and technologies and hone our skills in plow-maneuvering snow “Road-eos” at times when most of the state is focused on staying cool.

SHA gives considerable thought to the products we use, especially salt. Although salt application is the most efficient tool used to melt ice, too much can be detrimental to the environment. Like our counterparts throughout the country, we must be judicious in our use without endangering either the safety of motorists or the condition of the environment.

SHA’s maintenance teams across the state are focused on “sensible salting” practices to bring us closer to that critical line that divides “not enough” from “too much.” When the forecast and temperatures are conducive, we pre-treat roads with salt brine, which reduces the amount of salt needed later. Trucks have equipment to wet salt with brine as it is released from the spinner onto the road to reduce scatter, allowing crews to use less.

In Garrett County, where it is not uncommon to have 30 snow events in one season, sensible salting is especially critical. There, SHA and contractor crews are instructed to focus primarily on placing limestone grit to create traction during the overnight hours, when colder temperatures make salt less effective, and waiting until the sun is out to rely on salt. To help maximize the salt they do use, many of SHA’s trucks in Western Maryland are modified with a lower salt spreader to reduce bounce and we have piloted installation of special cameras to help drivers see how much salt they are spreading.

These practices are explained in greater detail in a document posted on the [SHA website](#). Though we are proud that our salt usage is significantly reduced from previous years and we expect that the tons per lane mile will continue to drop as we practice sensible salting, you will not find a hard and fast number in our plan for the rate of salt to be applied. Nor would it be practical for us to take salt usage by other regions and apply it to what we do in Maryland. We base our use on our highway system and its users. For example, I-68 in Garrett County must accommodate more than two and a half times the traffic volume of I-75 in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and many of the drivers on I-68 come from nearby metropolitan areas and are not equipped or expecting to travel over snow-packed roads.

SHA is committed to environmental stewardship and sensible salting. The next time winter weather strikes and creates treacherous conditions on the road that lies between you and your loved ones, your responsibilities or the emergency care you need, rest assured: SHA knows that the right amount of salt is the amount it takes to keep you safe.

Sincerely,

Melinda B. Peters
Administrator

My telephone number/toll-free number is 800-323-6742

Maryland Relay Service for Impaired Hearing or Speech 1.800.735.2258 Statewide Toll Free

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