

## Aurora looking to stockpile winter salt following last year's shortage

It might still be spring, but the Town of Aurora is looking to stockpile road salt now before the winter ahead after last season's shortages.

Next week, Council will be asked to authorize an additional \$250,000 to the road salt budget, bringing the projected cost for the 2026-2027 winter salt season to a total of \$2,668,856.

A significant salt shortage occurred across Ontario during the 2025-2026 winter season, with suppliers reducing allocations, delaying deliveries, and in some cases, rationing supply, said staff in their report to Council. To maintain continuity of winter maintenance operations, the Town was required to secure additional material earlier than planned, and increase stockpile levels to avoid running out during peak winter events.

The Town proactively manages its salt inventory by filling the salt dome early in the season. This approach allows the Town to take advantage of early fill rates that secures material at a lower cost, reducing reliance on higher-priced mid-season purchases and delays due to delivery logistics.

Stockpiling salt last year, the report notes, the Town was able to maintain adequate supply of de-icing material to ensure service levels were not impacted.

Looking ahead to the 2026-2027 winter season, the Town must continue this proactive inventory strategy. Early-season filing ensures adequate supply before demand spikes and provides protection against further supply chain disruptions. Maintaining a full stockpile also mitigates the risk of service interruptions, road safety impacts, and non-compliance with provincial minimum maintenance standards should additional shortages occur. Given the volatility of the salt supply market and the operational necessity of maintaining safe winter road conditions, the requested \$250,000 increase is required to secure material in advance and ensure service continuity.

Taking a first look at the recommendations at the Committee level, Councillors said staff did a good job in maintaining service levels last winter but questioned whether work was being done to find alternatives to more traditional de-icing materials.

It's a pretty scary situation, and our staff did remarkably well, where a municipality could run out of salt, which directly affects road safety, etc., said Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner, wondering whether shortages will be the way of the future going forward.

She said it was lucky that staff were proactive last year and asked for further mitigation measures to reduce salt to be considered.

This year was a bit of a perfect storm, said Sara Tienkamp, Aurora's Director of Operations. We had back-to-back events, they were early in the season. There was high demand on salt in the industry and, as you can appreciate, it's a tiered system. The larger users get first demand of it Provincial highways, Federal institutions and once it gets down to municipalities we are down the list for delivery. Contractors were in a worse-case scenario than us. Aurora is very fortunate; we have a large salt barn, we have the ability to stockpile significant amounts compared to other municipalities. So, for us, I don't necessarily see us having an issue in the future. It's all weather-dependent as well, but our staff have, because of our ability to stockpile and our ability to manage the salt very well, I'm confident we won't find ourselves in this position necessarily.

Alternatives, such as de-icing material derived from beets, are being looked at for the future but Tienkamp said none of the alternatives are proven yet at the scale that would be required for Aurora and the realities of the Canadian winter.

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