

Conservation Authority calls for municipal support in combatting salt pollution

It's a time of year where the feeling of salt crunching underfoot is a reminder we're in the midst of winter, but once this salt dissolves, it's on its way to local watercourses and that's a challenge the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) is looking to address.

The TRCA is encouraging municipalities like Aurora to adopt a motion requesting the Attorney General of Ontario to introduce limited liability legislation practices to help regulate salt use in municipalities, while also providing training and certification on best practices surrounding snow and ice management.

"TRCA has been monitoring water quality in streams, and water bodies including Lake Ontario in the Greater Toronto Area region for decades, including chloride concentrations, which are often associated with winter road salt application," says the TRCA in its motion, which Aurora Council will consider adopting this week. "Our analysis shows that chloride concentrations in TRCA's watersheds are above Canadian Water Quality Guidelines in many areas and continue to rise, in some cases, to levels lethal to sensitive aquatic life.

"The practice of winter salting for road safety often leads to excessive application due to concerns over liability. Municipalities, industry and other Conservation Authorities are calling on the Province to address this issue by introducing limited liability protection legislation and promulgating regulations which protects property owner and managers, including municipalities, and government agencies from slip and fall lawsuits if they have taken all reasonable steps to follow Provincial best-management practices."

The TRCA's motion first came before Council at the Committee level earlier this month.

While local lawmakers sought assurances that passing the TRCA's motion wasn't doubling up on other salt mitigation measures passed by Council last year, the request to the Attorney General was supported.

"When we get something from the TRCA about something they feel is as important as this, we should support it," said Ward 3 Councillor Wendy Gaertner.

Added Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland: "I am absolutely in support of this, and I think all this really does is strengthen the validity of what us, as municipalities, want to enforce going forward when it comes to salt management. It's been an ongoing situation. I think this puts pressure on the Province and I think it is one small way that we can do moving this forward."

Also lending his support to the motion was Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim.

"We all know every winter when we see salting and oversalting, there are downstream impacts, and I mean that figuratively and literally," he said. "If we can involve the province and they can legislate something with all stakeholders in mind, then I'd be in support."

The element of training and certification could lead to added costs, Councillors said, underscoring this as one particular question of concern, but Councillor Gaertner countered there would be trade-offs.

"There would be an investment in training, but there would also be a savings in salt," she said.

Added Mayor Tom Mraz: "I think we're all supportive, so hopefully the Province and the Attorney General, as well as the Minister of the Environment, will listen and make necessary changes at the Provincial level to have this succeed."

By Brock Weir
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