

Good Ice Melt Products and Techniques

Although we don't regularly experience heavy snow throughout the winter months in Oklahoma, there are times when we get hit with a nor'easter. The affects can have us outside – shoveling snow and sprinkling various types of ice melt products to ease the assault of the storm. As you work your way through the removal of the snow, consider the following pros/cons, tips & techniques, and methods for the effective use of various ice melt products:

Know Your Ice Melt Products

Ice melt products are quite helpful when labeled directions are followed. Most of the chemicals marketed to melt ice are salts specially formulated to lower the freezing point of water. Of all ice melt products available, the most prevalent salt varieties contain calcium chloride, magnesium chloride, sodium chloride and potassium chloride. Calcium chloride is considered to be the most effective because it is capable of melting ice faster and in much colder temperatures. Calcium chloride also generates heat; which speeds up the melting process.

On the other hand, rock salt is capable of lowering the freezing point down to 25°F, thus making this product most effective in areas that do not deal with extremely low temperatures. In regions where the temperature may fluctuate between falling below 25°F and rising above it, rock salt could cause damage to surfaces. This is as a result of the frequent freeze and thaw cycles causing concrete to crack or create weak spots.

Affects to Your Pets and Plants

When it comes to the impact of ice melt products on pets and plants, bear in mind that some products can be harmful, depending on what and how much is used. As stated above, most products marketed for melt ice are salts that lower freezing points of water. The most commonly used chemicals are salts, with the exception of urea, which is found in fertilizers. While the chemical will thaw the ice, it does have some undesirable effects. Damage to plants can happen in two ways: 1) when directly when splashed on plants and 2) when absorbed into the soil. When the splashed salt comes in contact with a plant, it may cause direct injury to evergreen leaves, buds and the stems of deciduous plants. Unfortunately, this may not be evident until spring.

The Ideal Approach

As mentioned earlier, follow the manufacturer's directions for use. When it comes to protecting your precious pets and plants, make certain to remove as much ice melt and rock salt by hand and apply an ice melt chemical only to remove the very last layer. Try mixing sand with ice melt at a 3-to-1 ratio to minimize the need for chemicals. The sand will provide traction for our feet and tires on our cars. And, don't forget cat litter – for limited applications. Cat litter is made of clay or several organic products that are not harmful to the environment.

Fortunately, in Oklahoma, we do not have to deal with brutal winters as many others do. And, when we do, most people are prepared to manage a few days of father winter.