

## **Proper Use of Ice Melt Products**

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 tips and techniques for the effective use of 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 the 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. Most products marketed for melt ice are salts that lower freezing points of water. The chemicals may have some undesirable side 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. Note that this may not be evident until spring. These chemicals may also cause damage to concrete and other structures around your home.

### **The Ideal Approach**

As mentioned earlier, follow the manufacturer's directions for use. When it comes to protecting your precious pets and plants, consider using either sand or cat litter rather than these salts as neither is harmful to the environment. Cat litter is usually a form of clay which will be incorporated into the soil.

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