

Proper Use of Ice Melt Products

Most often, we do not experience heavy snow throughout the winter months in Oklahoma. However, 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 weather the storm and 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, potassium chloride and sodium 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 (sodium chloride) can lower the freezing point down to 25°F. This makes the product most effective in areas that do not deal with extremely low temperatures. In regions where the temperatures fluctuate above and below 25°F, rock salt could cause damage to surfaces. This is because 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 ice melt are salts that simply lower the freezing point of water. As the chemical thaws it can

have some undesirable effects. Damage to plants can happen in two ways - when directly when splashed on plants and when absorbed into the soil. When the splashed salt comes in contact with a plant it may cause direct injury above ground to evergreen leaves, buds and the stems of deciduous plants. Unfortunately, this may not be evident until spring....and then it's too late. When splashed on the ground, moisture will eventually dissolve it into the soil. But, it will be very slow to leach through the root zone thus actually killing the plant from below. Basically, a one-two punch!

The Ideal Approach

First and foremost, 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 to remove the very last layer. Sometimes, dilution can be a solution. Try mixing sand at a 3:1 ratio with ice melt to minimize the need for chemicals. The sand will provide traction for our feet and tires. Don't forget about cat litter (for limited applications). Cat litter is made of clay and other minerals that are not harmful to the environment.

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