

Proper Selection & Use of Ice Melt Products: The Good & The Bad

In our neck of the woods, we do not regularly experience heavy snow throughout the winter months. However, every now and then, Oklahoma gets slammed with a nor'easter and we find ourselves 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 melting ice are salts those lower freezing points of water. The chemicals may have some undesirable side effects to plants. Damage to plants can occur 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 damage may not be evident until later in the 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 of these products are harmful to the environment. Cat litter is usually a form of clay which will be incorporated into the soil. Also, mixing your ice melt product with an abrasive such as sand, will reduce the amount of salt on your pavement and provide traction. Make certain to place it in layers. Apply a thin layer, prior to the storm and another light layer afterwards.

Fortunately, in Oklahoma, we do not have to deal with brutal winters every year but, when we do, hopefully this will guide you to be better prepared to manage a few days of father winter.