

Wanted: Policy standards that enable practice standards



By PHILL SEXTON

The past several years have seen increased finger-pointing at the private snow and ice management industry for the environmental woes resulting from the over-application and misuse of deicers. While snow removal contractors play a role, my research over the past year has led me to realize that faulty practice is only part of the problem. As complicit in this trend, and perhaps more so, are forces that are beyond snow contractors' control.

The bottom line is the lack of comprehensive understanding about our services is hampering the evolution of standards of practice. Those who have taken the time to educate themselves on this topic know reducing salt use is better for the environment and can reduce costs while delivering the same level of service if properly managed. However, trends driving the snow industry are counter-productive to this concept.

Policy cracks

Snow contractors are bound by policies at the client and legislative levels that drive an overly cautious approach to ice management. Slip and fall liability is a major factor that drives how clients define the level of service. In addition, a growing litigious society has moved slip and falls to the forefront. No one wants to be sued, and given that current contracts require snow contractors to shoulder the majority of the liability, the "more salt is safer" mentality is understandable.

While liability plays a role in salt use, according to my research and industry surveys, contract structure-related LOS and revenue/profit are actually the most heavily weighted drivers in salt use.

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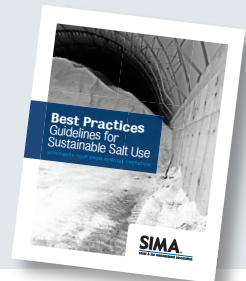
To enact true salt reduction, industry stakeholders must do their part



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www.sima.org/sustainablesalt

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From the client side, LOS tied to quality perceptions (more salt = better service) and budgetary pressures (salting is more efficient than plowing) drive salt use. From the contractor side, four of the five most common contract types incentivize the use of more salt. Snow companies whose business models focus on salt as a profit center have no financial incentive to use less salt.

Building on sound practice

Snow and ice management professionals are taking steps to reduce salt use by implementing better standards of practice (calibration rates, tracking, better equipment, adherence to best practices).

SIMA and several members have spent the past five years funding and/or participating in research that led to the formation of our Sustainable Salt Initiative program and Salt Use Best Practices, both of which are designed to educate snow contractors on successful salt reduction. We have partnered with and engaged in conversations with groups in Minnesota, New York, New Hampshire and Ontario (to name a

few) to see how we can work together to move the needle.

While progress is being made, if salt reduction is really going to be a priority, snow contractors cannot do it alone. All stakeholders — service providers, clients, suppliers and manufacturers, insurance, trade associations, environmental agencies and governmental bodies — need to work together to facilitate change.

If we are truly serious about this issue, it will require members of every stakeholder group commit to self-regulated standards of policy that enable standards of practice. Creating easily understood, accessible and affordable guidelines with all stakeholders' input will have a better chance for broad adoption and successful implementation. **SB**

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Check out results from our recent industry survey that focused on factors driving salt use on page 23.

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