Sustainable Salt Initiative takes off

Research partnerships are helping the industry become more sophisticated and accountable in how it manages chemical use

BY PHILL SEXTON

On June 10, 2015, I emailed some of the SIMA staff with a last-minute project before the 18th Annual Snow & Ice Symposium. We needed to fortify some marketing information and material for a new salt application research initiative. For the past two years, I've been helping to coordinate an extension of a comprehensive research project for salt application rates on parking lots.

Over the past five years, SIMA has invested in and supported the Snow and Ice Control for Parking Lots, Platforms, and Sidewalks (SICOPS) multi-year research project undertaken by the iTSS Lab at the University of Waterloo, with support from many interested parties. The primary goal of this project is to address the common question that faces every winter maintenance contractor: What are the right snow and ice control methods, materials and amounts that should be applied to parking lots and sidewalks under specific winter weather conditions? In conjunction with this project, a new software and material tracking system called Viaesys was developed.

After years of collecting SICOPS data, we have a solid baseline on true application rates in controlled settings. Now we are entering a new and exciting phase of SIMA's investment in research, in which SIMA and Viaesys will focus on collecting core data from in-the-field applications by snow contractors across North America. This information will be coupled with SICOPS research to determine recommendations for salt applications that make business sense and proactively address environmental concerns associated with over-application.

SUSTAINABLE SALT INITIATIVE

Participants receive the following benefits:

- Automatically track salt use, which can save money
- Maintain automated service records
- Receive training on calibration and best practices
- Receive supplemental marketing materials

Learn how you can participate at www.sima.org/SustainableSalt.

In line with this, the goal will be to develop local standards — backed by years of real-world data — that fit the needs and expectations of a specific region.

Strength in numbers

We seek leaders in the industry who are willing to invest in the process of collecting real-world data on salt application rates. After an initial investment in equipment, these contractors will be outfitted with a web-based, GPS-enabled salt tracking system that automatically tracks material as sites are serviced. Supplemental marketing materials will be provided for research participants to share with clients and prospects. Long term, this data may be used to develop practical, easy to implement winter maintenance guidelines that could potentially be defensible in court.

When I sent the email on June 10, it began a conversation internally that resulted in a solidification of this program into the Sustainable Salt Initiative. It's exciting to watch this evolve organically into an organized process to tackle one of our industry's bigger issues. As the past few winters have shown, an over-reliance on salt can become an Achilles' heel for a snow business when supplies become limited or costs skyrocket. As an industry, we must hit this one head-on before government intervention and public pressure pushes us into a reactive position.

We think rigorous scientific research, field data, and statistical analysis will create a working set of recommendations. We also feel that this initiative will provide a path for industry professionals to understand application rates, save money, benchmark their own performance, mitigate regulatory threats, and improve service verification.

I believe in the power of people working together, and this industry is poised to take the next steps to become more sophisticated and accountable in how we manage the chemicals we put on the ground during each storm. Visit www.sima.org/SustainableSalt to become a part of the research. ❄

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