

DASHING INCENTIVES

Clients and profits encourage overuse of salt

BY PHILL SEXTON, CSP // CONTRIBUTOR

The past several years have seen increased finger pointing at the private snow and ice management industry for the environmental impacts resulting from the over-application and misuse of deicers. While contractors who choose to use salt as a profit producer play a role, a lack of comprehensive understanding about snow and ice is hampering the evolution of standards of practice that could help the industry become more professional and better stewards of the environment.

Surveys and research conducted by industry experts and *Snow Business* magazine pinpoint several key issues that are making it difficult to move the needle on reducing salt use in the private snow and ice management industry:

Application guideline disparity

A wide disparity in salt application rate guidelines makes it difficult to get contractor buy-in on adopting a “less is more” methodology. Recent studies show that current rates used in commercial winter management and private roads exceed most recommended guidelines.

Lack of financial incentive

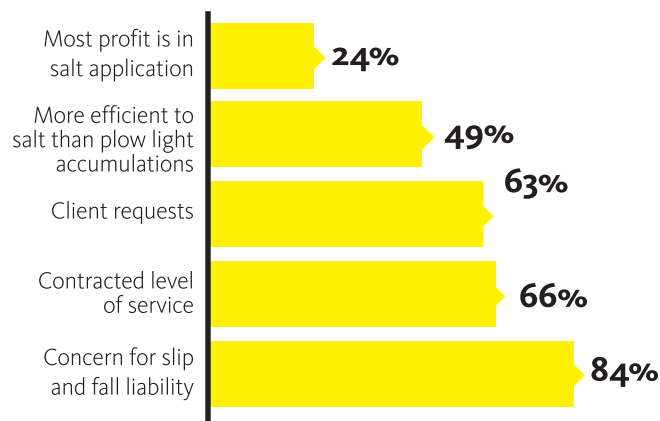
The majority of common contract types (per event, per season, etc.) provide no financial motivation to use less salt. Charging for salt by the application or by the amount (per ton, per bag) incentivizes companies to use more salt than necessary since contractors pass those costs onto their customers. More than 50% of respondents in a recent *Snow Business* salt use survey reported they would be less profitable if they reduced current application rates or frequency, showing that they see salt as the main income generator.

Client expectations

Level of service (LOS) and/or quality expectations from clients drive contractors to over rely on salt to deliver “wet” or “black pavement” conditions, particularly for clients who define their expectation as “zero tolerance.” Survey results show that rates and frequencies of salt application rates

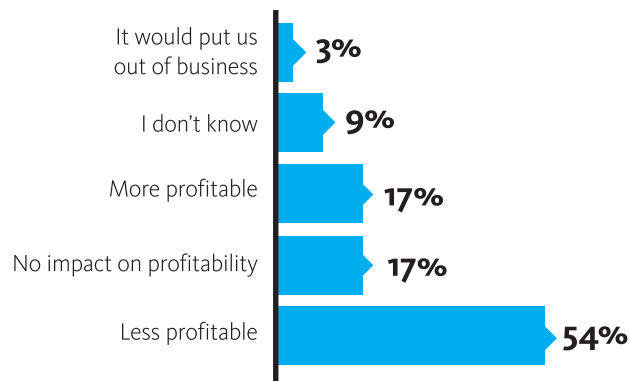
SALT APPLICATION INFLUENCERS

Below are the top 5 influences that determine the amount of salt applied. When asked to rate the No. 1 influencer, more than 50% cited concerns for slips & falls.



SALT REDUCTION & PROFITABILITY

The majority stated they would be less profitable if forced to reduce salt use. A bright spot? 34% reported no impact or increased profitability.



increase when contracted levels of service or perceived levels of quality increased. A *Snow Business* survey showed that 63% of companies didn't feel confident that they could maintain LOS expectations if they were required to reduce salt use.



Contradicting goals

Based on our ongoing research combined with my 30 years' experience as a winter management professional (contractor) applying salt, as long as the amount of salt applied is the primary driver for revenue and profit, then expecting contractors to significantly reduce the amount of salt they apply and sustain business growth isn't a realistic expectation.

Winter management service contracts that compensate for the amount and frequency of salt applied is not sustainable. The industry can't be expected to significantly reduce the amount of salt used unless there is a significant shift in policy for how salt and ice management services are sold, contracted and paid. **SB**

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HOW CAN YOU MOVE THE NEEDLE?

- 1** Follow and advocate for a "Less is More" code of conduct related to salt use.
- 2** Adopt contract types that do not incentivize salt use. Sell as a service not an amount.
- 3** Invest in technology to measure salt output. You can't improve what you don't measure.
- 4** Calibrate salt spreaders based on an estimated target of salt to be used per site/area. Analyze and compare results for continuous improvement.
- 5** Implement anti-icing techniques to prevent the bond of accumulated snow and ice. Research shows preventing the bond reduces salt quantities by at least four times the traditional means of only deicing to break the bond.
- 6** Clear accumulated snow whenever possible. Don't "burn off" low-snow accumulations.
- 7** Apply salt based on surface vs. air temperature.
- 8** Benchmark salt application performance with established salt application rates and best management practices. (www.sima.org/bestpractices)
- 9** Optimize solid salt use by implementing pre-wetting systems (spray brine at the spinner) and plow technology that removes the maximum amount of snow from uneven surfaces.
- 10** Educate clients on the effects of salt pollution, property damage and the financial impact of salt over-reliance.