

Winter Watershed Practices

Winter has arrived! While winter is a season full of wonder and adventure, it can also be harsh on our cars, roads, and watersheds! Read on for some winter tips on how you can protect all three this year.

What is a Watershed?

A watershed is an area of land where all the precipitation (like rain or snow) drains into a common body of water, such as a stream, creek, river, or lake. Everyone lives in a watershed! Do you know which watershed you live in? Visit centrallakeerie.org to find out!

A healthy watershed positively affects the water quality, soil, plants, and animals (including humans) that live within it, so it is important to keep your watershed healthy. Stormwater, which includes rain and snowmelt, flows over the surface of the land into the nearest storm sewer, stream, or lake untreated. Therefore, anything we put on our land (good or bad) can be carried into our waterways by stormwater, affecting the watershed health. During the winter season, there are many actions one can take to protect our watershed and reduce stormwater runoff.

Shovel Early & Wisely

Shoveling snow early and often prevents ice from forming and minimizes the need for products (such as rock salt or sand). Always shovel before applying salt. When shoveling snow, keep in mind where you place your snow piles, as snowmelt is often full of contaminants. Choose locations where the snow will have the greatest opportunity to infiltrate the soil as it melts, filtering out any harmful pollutants, instead of melting directly into runoff. Avoid piling snow too close to storm drains, local waterways, and impervious surfaces, like driveways and roads.



Sensible Salting

While salting is common practice in Ohio, too much salt can damage watershed health, in addition to roads and cars. When using salt or other de-icing products, use only the instructed amount, as excess salt will not melt snow any faster. Sweep up any excess salt to prevent it from entering storm drains. When it comes to de-icing products, there are many options with varying environmental impacts. Traditional rock salts (such as sodium chloride) are harmful to aquatic organisms in the same way excess salt is harmful to humans. Alternatives, such as CMA (calcium magnesium acetate) or KA (potassium acetate), have fewer environmental impacts, and can be found at most hardware stores. In addition, while sand or kitty litter can be used to increase traction, they can clog sewers and degrade stream habitat. When looking to increase traction, try cracked corn, which will biodegrade. Lastly, keep temperature in mind when using any de-icer. Traditional salt is only effective above 15° F. When the weather is below 15° F, consider an alternative.



Winter Car Washing

During warmer periods of the season, it can be tempting to grab a hose and rinse the salt off your car. However, this results in the salt, grime, and various chemicals being rinsed into storm drains and contaminating waterways. Instead, leave car washing to the professionals, where rinse water is treated. In addition, check your vehicle for leaks, and be careful to keep antifreeze from spilling.

Shoveling smart, salting sensibly, and leaving the car washing to the pros are three simple ways one can contribute to a happier and healthier watershed this winter. For more information on these winter watershed practices and how you can keep your watershed healthy, check out cwrp.org!