

## **TO SALT OR NOT TO SALT ... SAND PILES THAT IS!**

Recently, VLCT staff asked local officials about how they handle their sand piles in winter. The question was asked because of the impending rule from the federal Environmental Protection Agency and state Stormwater Division that will require the enclosing of salted sand piles.

We knew that salt added to a sand pile helps keep the sand from freezing into unusable chunks of dirt. This keeps winter roads passable for pleasure cars (including those out-of-state, two-wheel drive vehicles with bald, all-season tires and drivers with zero experience in snow). We didn't know how extensive the practice of salting sand piles is, and what the alternatives might be.

First, let us say your responses were wonderful! And second, it is worth noting that the question of whether to salt or not to salt borders as much on religion as on practice. This only goes to prove the diversity and ingenuity among our municipalities - a good thing!

On to the results. Quite a few cities and towns around the state have experimented with not salting their sand piles, but many have stuck with the practice. Essentially, there are the no salt towns, the towns that salt as they put the sand in the truck, and the towns that mix the salt in the sand pile.

### **NO SALT**

One town that does not salt its sand pile is Waitsfield. Instead, the town uses a screen to break up chunks, hires a contractor occasionally to break through the crust, and also sets aside unmanageable chunks to start the next year's pile. Managing the frozen material is admittedly a major frustration for the Waitsfield road crew. The Town of Westford is trying the no-salt routine for the first time this year, without much enthusiasm. Road crew members spend a lot of time breaking up chunks in the back of the trucks. Essex stopped salting its sand pile two years ago and has found that, as a side benefit, mud season is far milder than it used to be.

Williamstown and Morristown do not salt. Instead, they use hand-applied chloride to the top of the pile to form a frost-free crust. Granville does not salt its pile but plans to cover it anyway because it is unusable if left open to the rain and ice. West Windsor, a no-salt town, is investigating covers for the same reason as Granville.

Incidentally, the Agency of Transportation garage in White River hasn't used salt in years.

Experience seems to say that the no-salt routine works better for larger sand piles because some years the sand can freeze to two to three feet deep. Most of that crust is unusable until the next year, but the sand underneath is fine to use. Again, as my Rutland Town advisor pointed out to me, sand doesn't rot. Use it next year or whenever.

### **SALT-SAND MIXES AS YOU GO**

In Warren, the road crew mixes a load of 1/2 salt and 1/2 sand for one truck as it is being sent out; the other trucks use sand. A screen/grinder is used to break up chunks of sand. Wilmington uses a similar system, employing a "grizzly" to break up the sand. Hartford and Craftsbury also mix salt and sand as needed inside covered facilities. Craftsbury's facility is a 30 x 30 cloth covered cement structure that keeps the salt contained before it is used. Brattleboro salts its sand as it is used. Rutland Town doesn't salt its pile, but uses a grizzly to separate large chunks. The sorted sand is piled under cover and then mixed with salt as it is used.

### **SALTED PILES**

Norwich does salt its sand pile, having experimented with the no-salt routine a few years ago. In that year, quite a bit of sand ended up being unusable. An effort to cover the sand pile with a plastic membrane also failed as the plastic proved troublesome as the winter wore on. Glover salts and screens its sand as they stockpile it. Cavendish tried the no-salt routine last year but spent far too much time breaking frozen clods on the grizzly, and is back to salting the pile this year. Johnson, Hinesburg and Northfield also salt their sand piles.

Clearly this is by no means a comprehensive list. It should be helpful to towns that are thinking about how to handle their sand piles in future years. And we are sure that the highway departments in the various towns mentioned here would be happy to discuss their experience in more detail.

*- Karen Horn, Director, VLCT Legislative and Membership Services*