How Does Salt Affect Our River?

Salt is a frequent water pollutant in winter. Too much salt in the water harms fish and other aquatic organisms. Streams that support good populations of freshwater fish have conductivities in the range 150 to 800 µs/cm.

Many aquatic organisms, such as this dragonfly nymph, are sensitive to high salt concentrations.

How Does Salt Get Into the River?

- We salt icy roads and side-walks in winter
- Salt runs off into our streams
- Water softening releases salt to our streams

What Does Conductivity Measure?

Conductivity measures the ability of a water sample to conduct electricity. Pure water has almost no ability to carry current. The presence of dissolved atomic-sized particles (ions) in water allows it to conduct.

How Can We Reduce the Amount of Salt in the River?

- Substitute sand for salt when possible
- Use less salt at home and work
- Don't dispose of water soft-ener backwash in city drains

What Can Cause High Conductivity in our River?

- Dissolved minerals such as gypsum, limestone, clay soils, and weathering rock
- Sodium chloride and calcium chloride for de-icing roads
- Industrial wastewaters
- Water softening
- Treated and untreated domestic sewage

The conductivity of a water sample gives a fairly good measure of the overall concentration of ionic substances (salts, acids, alkalis) in the water. It doesn't tell you what in the water is causing the conductivity.

Huron River Watershed Council

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