

Hold the salt! Region weaning itself off

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

It may be the last thing on your mind now, but York Region is preparing to battle winter's ice and snow.

The region's works department recently approved a \$450,000 pilot project that will battle snow and black ice and reduce the amount of salt spread on roads.

The move was applauded by one environmentalist.

"I think it's a fabulous initiative," said Brent Kopperson, a Sutton resident who is associated with a number of environmental initiatives, including Green Communities and the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association.

Road salt has been identified as a toxin, Mr. Kopperson said, adding groundwater supplies and watercourses are endangered by copious amounts of salt that wash off road surfaces.

The region's transportation and works department has been studying ways to reduce road salt for some time.

Costs of the pilot project will be offset by savings in the amount of salt used, Brian Harrison, director of roads transportation, told the committee. There was also a budget surplus from this past winter, when moderate conditions required less maintenance.

This coming winter, the region will apply pre-wetted salt to regional roads that carry

more than 20,000 vehicles a day, encompassing all multi-lane roads and many two-lane routes as well, Mr. Harrison said.

"This will reduce the amount of salt used during light storms and produce a safer road. As the snow hits the pavement, it starts to melt right away, so you don't get any binding on the pavement."

Salt brine sticks when applied and won't bounce off the road surface, as does conventional rock salt, Mr. Harrison said. It can also be applied prior to a snow fall, he said.

"This treatment can be given up to two days in advance of a storm," Mr. Harrison said.

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APPLIED NIGHT BEFORE

Salt brine can also be applied overnight to prevent formation of black ice, a menace to early morning commuters, he said.

Mr. Kopperson said the pilot project appears to balance the need to provide safe winter roads with environmental concerns.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

"It's really the best of both worlds. It's been way too long coming," he said.

"It's one of those things, as Canadians living in Ontario, we have been taking for granted for a long time."

Salt brine has been used in limited experiments on Mulock Drive in Newmarket and along the Hwy. 7 corridor, Mr. Harrison said, adding if the expanded pilot project is successful, the new material could be used on roads throughout the region.

Security concerns for cigarette sellers

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pack because we are a company store and that's what head office is telling us the prices are now," said the manager of Beckers Variety on Carlton Rd in Unionville. He declined to give his name.

The higher prices are resurrecting another concern for retailers: theft.

"The last time taxes went up there was an increase of crime and we had to increase security," said Mr. Monaghan.

"We can get insurance on cigarettes but only on a certain amount, between \$5,000 and \$10,000. With the price going up that covers less product."

A survey of convenience stores in the Markham and Stouffville areas found many owners who were unsure of what

tax hikes will do to sales, and some who were despondent about their options.

Some retailers, though, did not foresee any problems.

"I don't care if they've raised the prices, it's not going to bug me all that much," said Dan Lynch, manager of Markham Convenience on Wooten Way in Markham.

"The only positive thing that will come out of it is the government will profit from PST collected at the wholesale level, because wholesalers are being charged by the government."

Mr. Lynch says the expenditures for retailers means it does not pay to sell cigarettes.

"I have to pay for security, insurance, and I would prefer it if they put them in the liquor stores to let them deal with it."

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—Dan Lynch, manager of Markham Convenience

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