P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Environment & Transportation

Testimony on: HB371 "Environment – Salt Applicator Certification Program - Establishment"

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 9, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB371, which would establish a Smart Salt Certification program that requires commercial applicators to take a course on the efficient application of salt or salt alternatives. The bill would give the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) two years to implement the program and would require commercial applicators be certified by October 1, 2024. Commercial applicators would be required to take a short course to be certified, maintain records of salt application for the past three years and submit an annual report on salt use to the MDE.

While the application of salt serves a necessary safety purpose during a winter weather event, excessive salt is detrimental in many aspects including safety, public health, and the health of our natural waterways.[1] Salt is corrosive to pipes, bridges, buildings, and cars. Salt corrodes building foundations and degrades historical structures. As a car travels down a salted roadway, the undercarriage becomes coated with salty water. This can cause corrosion in the working metal parts of the suspension, drive train, and brake system.

Corrosion in pipes that carry drinking water is a public health risk in two ways. First, the salt can cause damage to the pipes themselves causing the integrity of the pipe to be compromised. Secondly, the salt itself becomes unhealthy to us when the levels rise. Salt is not removed by municipal wastewater treatment systems, and so it passes through the process from wastewater to drinking water intact. Thus salt is being returned with the clean water to our homes. Rising salt levels in our water supply are a serious concern for people who are on an extremely low sodium diet. Reverse osmosis systems can remove salt when installed in a household setting but are far too expensive to implement on the scale of a wastewater treatment plant.

Salt does not break down in the environment. Salt applied to our roadways is washed into our streams and eventually into the Chesapeake Bay. Increasing salt levels threaten the health of our natural waterways, and high levels have been known to cause fish kills. Rising salt levels cause damage to stream ecosystems and will alter the types of species that can survive in these saltier

[1] Environmental Protection Agency (November, 2020) Winter is Coming! And with it, tons of salt on our roads

conditions. Once dissolved, salt ions can even dissolve toxic metals and carry them into the waterways where they threaten wildlife survival.[2]

While currently there is no economically viable alternative to the application of salt for deicing roadways, we can reduce the amounts used. This program would have a high return for our environment, our public health, and the resilience of our building, roadway, and pipe infrastructures. We urge a favorable report.

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[2] New York Times (January 7, 2022. Road Salt Works. But It's Also Bad for the Environment.