



HB1360 - Environment - Road Salt - Outdoor Storage

Hearing date: Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Korman and the members of the Environment & Transportation Committee:

Waterkeepers Chesapeake and the below signed organizations respectfully request a FAVORABLE report on HB1360 which prohibits the uncovered storage of road salts and requires MDE to develop regulations for proper storage and fines for noncompliance. This is a common-sense bill that will prevent road salt from contaminating our freshwater resources.

When road salts enter freshwater, the mineral chlorides separate into individual elements. These elements, particularly chloride, are toxic to the aquatic species that need freshwater, not salty water, to survive and thrive. Scientists call this “freshwater salinization syndrome.” This occurs when salty, alkaline freshwaters release chemicals, including toxic metals and harmful nitrogen-containing compounds, from streambeds and drainage basin soils. These chemicals can travel through watersheds, forming 'chemical cocktails' that can have more devastating effects on drinking water supplies and ecosystems when compared with individual contaminants alone.

In addition, when salt enters freshwater, it can have a negative effect on the natural mixing of the water column. In some cases, salinization can alter parameters such as temperature, sediment concentrations and dissolved oxygen levels, and prevent vertical mixing in the water column—a phenomenon called stratification. If persistent stratification occurs, this can increase the availability of undesirable nutrients to fuel nuisance aquatic weeds and algae. This, in turn, can deplete oxygen, causing insufficient habitat conditions for native aquatic life. Put simply, the occurrences of invasive species infestations, fish kills, and poor water quality may be greater when road salt enters freshwater resources.

Most concerning is that salt can be retained in ecosystems to a much greater extent than was previously realized. Concentrations have been increasing over time, even in watersheds without new roads. Moreover, summertime levels can be as high as in the winter – meaning that organisms are exposed to high concentrations during their active and reproductive periods.

But the impacts are not limited to water. Salty soils can kill plants as evidenced by dead or diseased vegetation found along many roadways. When these plants die, their ability to provide food and habitat for wildlife is lost. It also gives non-native invasive plant species an opening.

To protect our freshwater resources from the serious and long-term harm from road salt, Waterkeepers Chesapeake and the below signed organizations request a favorable report on HB1360.

Sincerely,
Robin Broder, Acting Executive Director
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
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Betsy Nicholas, VP of Programs & Litigation
Brent Walls, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper
Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper
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Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper & Director of Riverkeeper Programs
Annie Richards, Choptank Riverkeeper
Ben Ford, Miles-Wye Riverkeeper
Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper
ShoreRivers

Elle Bassett, West, Rhode & South Riverkeeper
Arundel Rivers Federation

Alice Volpitta, Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper
Blue Water Baltimore

Taylor Swanson, Executive Director & Assateague Coastkeeper
Assateague Coastal Trust

Theaux LeGardeur, Executive Director & Riverkeeper
Gunpowder Riverkeeper

Sara Caldes, Severn Riverkeeper